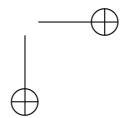
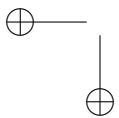
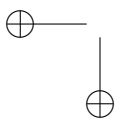
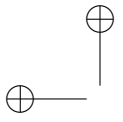


The Antigone of Sophocles

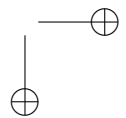
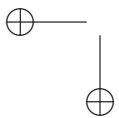


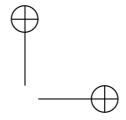
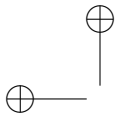




The Antigone of Sophocles
Translated by John Jay Chapman

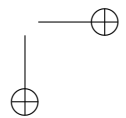
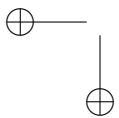
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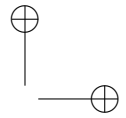




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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CREON, King of Thebes.

ANTIGONE and ISMENE, sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles.

HÆMON, son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.

TEIRESIAS, a blind prophet.

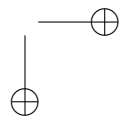
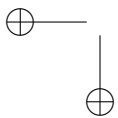
EURYDICE, wife of Creon.

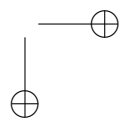
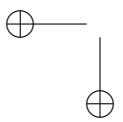
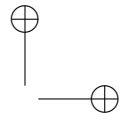
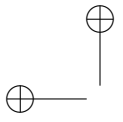
Guard.

Messengers.

Chorus, consisting of Theban Elders.

Attendants and the Boy who is guide to Teiresias.







ANTIGONE

Scene: In front of the royal palace at Thebes.

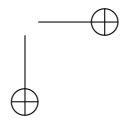
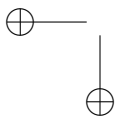
Time: Early morning. Antigone and Ismene are discovered.

ANTIGONE

Most blest of sisters, my Ismene dear,
Know'st thou mid all our heaven-inflicted woes
A single stroke of shame, dishonor, grief,
That Zeus, in memory of Œdipus,
Has not poured out upon thy head and mine?
And now, they say, the Captain of our host
Has published – hast thou heard? Art thou aware
Of the onstalking peril that foredooms
Both friend and foe alike?

ISMENE

To me no news
Nor sweet, nor bitter comes, since we were stripped





Of our two brothers on a single day,
And by a double stroke. When the dread host
Of vanquished Argives streamed away last night
I knew not whether to rejoice or weep.

ANTIGONE

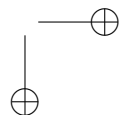
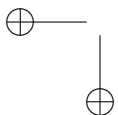
I thought so. 'Tis for this I called you forth
Beyond the walls to speak with you alone.

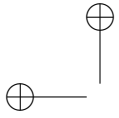
ISMENE

What is it? – There is trouble in thy mind.

ANTIGONE

'Tis – Hath not Creon singled out
One brother for an honorable grave,
Dishonoring the other? For they say
Eteocles with rites of burial
Is laid to rest and sprinkled with the soil,
Companioned by the sacred dead below,
While Polyneices, for his evil death,
Is treated as mere corpse. 'Tis heralded
No tomb shall clasp him and no tongue shall wail;
He is to lie unwept, unsepulchered –
A banquet for the vultures of the air.
Such are the tidings our good Creon heralds





To thee and me – to me; – and comes himself
To speak it plain for those who know it not.
Or take it lightly. Whoso disobeys
Is to be stoned to death. Thou hast it now.
And soon shalt show if thou be nobly bred
Or the base daughter of a noble race.

ISMENE

Alas, poor sister, what have I to do
In such a matter?

ANTIGONE

Wilt thou with toil and action aid the work?

ISMENE

Alas, what work? Explain your enterprise.

ANTIGONE

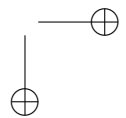
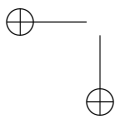
Shall thy hand aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE

What! Wouldst thou bury him in spite of Thebes?

ANTIGONE

My brother – and thine too – in spite of thee!
I'll not desert him.





ISMENE

Creon forbids, you say?

ANTIGONE

He hath no power to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE

Madness!

Think how our father sank from scorn to scorn,

A self-convicted criminal that tore out

His eyes with shame-avenging hands!

His mother –

Mother and wife – upon a twisted cord

Tortured her life to death; – and, last of all,

Our own two brothers on one fatal day

Each upon each wrought out their common doom.

Think of it! You and I alone are left:

We too shall come to death and infamy

If we defy the edict of this king.

And may we not remember we are women

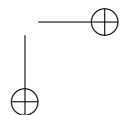
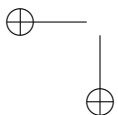
Matched against men, and stronger far than we –

And must submit through this and more than this?

As for myself, I ask the Underworld

For pardon, seeing that I am constrained.

'Tis folly to be too inquisitive.





ANTIGONE

I'll not command thee, no, nor, if you ask,
Welcome thee as a helper in the work.
Be what you list! But I will bury him;
And Death shall add a beauty to my deed.
A lover by my loved one I shall lie
Within the grave my crime has sanctified.
For those below require our cherishing
And for a longer day than those above.
There I shall lie forever. Be it thy part
To slight the everlasting laws of heaven.

ISMENE

I do them no dishonor. Only this: –
There is in me no force to brave the State.

ANTIGONE

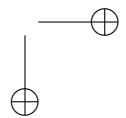
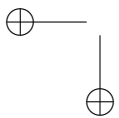
Such is thy pretext. I shall take my way
To sprinkle dust on my beloved brother.

ISMENE

Headstrong girl, I tremble for thee.

ANTIGONE

Fear not for me: but straighten thine own course.





ISMENE

At least disclose thy plan to nobody.
Hide – bury it: and I will do the same.

ANTIGONE

Denounce me rather! I shall hate thee more
For silence than for blazoning the act.

ISMENE

Thy heart is hot – upon a cold design.

ANTIGONE

They whom I wish to please will be content.

ISMENE

Ay, if thou canst! – But 'tis impossible.

ANTIGONE

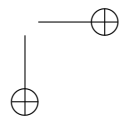
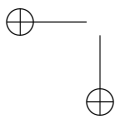
Therefore, when I have failed, I will desist.

ISMENE

A hopeless quest should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

If thou say that, I'll curse thee, and my curse
Will mingle with the curses of the dead.
Nothing in death is dreadful, save the fear
Lest Death be robbed of his nobility.



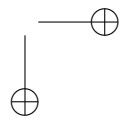
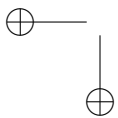


ISMENE

Go, if thou must, then, but be sure of this,
Thy quest is madness. Yet I love thee still!
(Exeunt Antigone and Ismene)

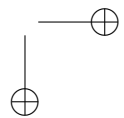
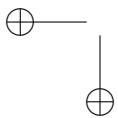
CHORUS

Beam of the rising sun, Day's golden eye,
Scattering thy splendors over Dirce's streams
Till Seven-Gated Thebes is smit with light,
Him didst thou smite
Who came with martial din –
The Great White Paladin –
With serried Argives pranked in armor bright,
Beneath thy glance they streamed,
Headlong they scattered, while their bridles gleamed
And danced in flight.
In wage of war against our King
White Argos, steel-clad, glittering
Rose with an eagle's shattered cries,
Nor stayed her wing
Till over Thebes she paused and stood –
Over our rooftrees in the skies –
Then ravening down
Round our seven-gated town,





Her snowy blaze of helms was seen,
Dazzling pinions, and the sheen
Of spears athirst for blood.
Ay, but ere she tasted ours,
Hard behind her came the rout,
The rage of Ares' battle-shout
To save our crown of towers,
And as she turned to meet the foe,
The Theban Dragon laid her low.
For Zeus abhors the boastful tongue,
And seeing that bright throng unrolled,
Holiday'd in clanging gold,
With noise of threat and blare of boast,
He hurled his brandished fire among
The shouters of the host.
They who raged and stormed of late,
With blasts of their tempestuous hate
Against our citadel –
Torch in hand they swayed, they fell,
Like frenzied bacchanals pell-mell
Beside the city gate.
Our seven gates of Thebes are dight
With seven trophies of the Foe:

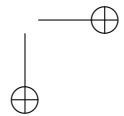
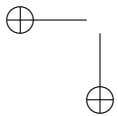




Captain 'gainst captain led the fight,
Till every Argive chieftain bright,
Overmatched in single might,
Fell beneath a Theban blow.
'Twas then the Theban Brothers died,
Locked in double fratricide.
Now Bacchus leads a New Age in
With glorious shout and merry din,
Bidding us drown all past distress
In a sweet forgetfulness.
Hand in hand, a linked chain.
We will visit every fane,
All night long, with dance and song,
Our sacred revelry maintain
As our leader doth command –
Bacchus, whose dancing shakes the land.
But hold! The King comes yonder; that new Lord
To whom the gods consign our destinies,
Creon – and moody. He is pondering
The purpose of this special conference
Of Elders that his mandate has convoked.

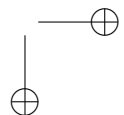
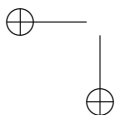
CREON

Sirs, I have summoned you: – Our ship of state,





After a leap toward shipwreck on the seas,
Is righted and protected by the gods.
And you, of all our folk, I call apart
Because I know ye staunch and loyal friends
To Laius' line and Laius' sovereignty,
And that with steadfast sense ye did sustain
The rule of $\text{\textcircled{E}}$ dipus, and when he died
Upheld the kingly power of his sons.
Since two of these have perished in one day,
Defiled by murderous, mutual, bloody blows,
The throne with all its powers devolves on me,
Through claim of closest kinship with the dead.
A king's mind is laid bare by governing,
And, to my thinking, any sovereign prince
Who shuns to execute his own resolves,
Or fears to name them, is a coward king.
If any man, in favor to some friend,
Esteem that friend above his country's good,
I count that man as naught –
All-seeing Zeus
Be now my witness! – I'll not hold my tongue
When ruin looms upon my citizens,
Nor hug as friend my country's enemy.

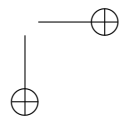
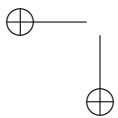




That country is the ship that bears us all,
And in her prosperous voyage true friends are safe.
Such are my principles of government,
And by their light I published this decree
Touching the sons of Œdipus.
Eteocles, who fell before these walls
Where every wreath of honor graced his spear,
Shall be entombed with all the circumstance
That follows martial glory to the grave.
But his own brother, Polyneices here,
The homing exile who would feed to flames
His gods, his temples, and his fatherland,
Lap up the blood of kinsmen and sell off
The residue as slaves – that man no tomb
Shall clasp, no voice bewail, but he shall lie
A mangled meal for dogs and birds of prey.
Such is my guiding thought: – Never by me
Shall bad men win the guerdon of the good;
But him that is a loyal son of Thebes,
Living or dead, I'll honor and befriend.

CHORUS

Such is thy pleasure, O Menœceus' son,
Touching this city's friend and enemy.





Thou hast the power to take what course thou wilt
As toward the dead, and as toward us who live.

CREON

See then that ye be guardians of the mandate.

CHORUS

Upon some younger shoulders lay thy charge.

CREON

Nay, watchers of the body have been found.

CHORUS

What further duty, then, do you enjoin?

CREON

Not to consort with those who disobey.

CHORUS

What man so foolish as to wish to die?

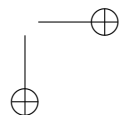
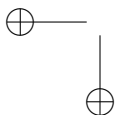
CREON

In sooth it comes to that. Yet hope of gold
Has often been men's ruin –

(Enter Guard)

GUARD

O King, I will not say that I am out of breath with running and
with lifting of a light heel; for I made many stops, and wheeled





in my path to go back. For my mind kept up a babble in my ears saying, ‘Fool, why dost thou run toward thy doom?’ and, ‘Wretch, why tarriest thou? And if Creon hear this from another, shalt thou not smart for it?’ – till my loitering turned my short road into a long one. But at last coming hither prevailed, and though my tale be naught, yet will I tell it with a good grip on one hope: – that I can suffer nothing that is not my fate.

CREON

Why are you terrified? Tell me the cause.

GUARD

First let me tell you about myself. I did not do the thing. I did not see the doer. I cannot be blamed for it.

CREON

Thy words are cloudy, but thy thoughts are clear.

Thou’dst save thy neck. Speak out the news at once.

GUARD

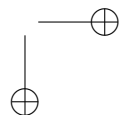
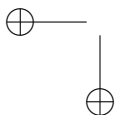
Ay, truly, it’s bad news that comes after a halt.

CREON

Then speak it plainly out and get thee gone.

GUARD

Well, as I tell thee. The corpse – some one has but now given it burial and gone away, after sprinkling dry dust on the flesh, with the other rites of burial.





CREON

What living man hath dared to do this deed?

GUARD

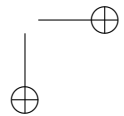
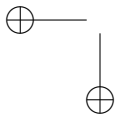
I know not, I. There was no mark of a pick nor of earth thrown up by a shovel. The ground was hard, dry, unbroken – no wheel, tracks. The man left no trace. When the first day-watchman showed it to us, sore wonder fell on us all. The body itself could not be seen, for it was lightly strewn with dust, as if by the hand of someone who was shunning the curse of impiety. No sign of a wild beast or of dogs tearing at him. The guards broke into wild talk and accused one another, and were coming to blows, with none to hinder. Every man was the culprit and none was convicted, for all swore innocence: and we were ready to take red-hot iron in our hands and walk through fire, swearing to the gods that we had done nothing and knew nothing of the matter. And at last, when all search was fruitless, one spake who made us all bow our heads to the earth with fear – for we could neither refute him nor escape if we obeyed. His word was that the thing must not be hid, but must be reported to thee. And this seemed best. And the lot fell upon me, poor devil, as my prize in the game. So here I stand, as unwelcome as unwilling, well I wot. For no one loves the bringer of bad news.

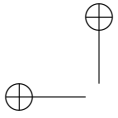
CHORUS

O King, my soul has long been whispering:
The gods have had a finger in this deed.

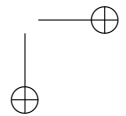
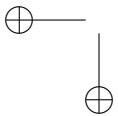
CREON

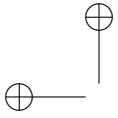
Cease, ere thy speaking fill me with disgust
And thou be proved an old man and a fool!





Insufferable fool, to think the gods
Would feel commiseration for this corpse
And heap superfluous honors on the man
Who came to burn their land, their pillar'd fanes,
Scattering their laws and treasures to the winds!
Dost think the gods do honor to bad men?
It cannot be! Yet from the first there were
Some muttering townfolk – wagging of their heads
As if they bore my yoke uneasily –
Who grumbled at my edict; and these men
Have bribed the slaves who did the villainy.
Money's the bud and flower of wickedness;
It sacks the town and desolates the hearth,
Warps honest natures to dishonest deeds,
And teaches all to practice every crime.
The knaves who were suborned to do this deed
Shall pay the price: it overhangs their heads.
Hear me! As Zeus hath still my reverence –
I speak it under oath – if ye who hear me
Fail to discover and before my eyes
Produce the author of this infamy,
Mere death shall not suffice you: ye shall live
Hung in midair till ye reveal the crime;





That henceforth ye may thieve with better thrift.
Set limits to your greed, or ye may find
That wealth ill got brings ruin in its wake.

GUARD

Am I to speak? or shall I turn and go?

CREON

Thy voice offends already. Know'st thou that?

GUARD

Is it thine ear or spirit feels the bite?

CREON

Would'st thou define the seat of my distress?

GUARD

The deed has vexed thy spirit, I thine ear.

CREON

Yes, with thy words. Thou art a babbler born.

GUARD

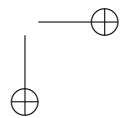
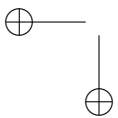
Perhaps, but not the doer of this deed.

CREON

Worse yet! The seller of his soul for gold.

GUARD

'Tis sad when he who judges doth misjudge.



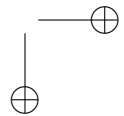
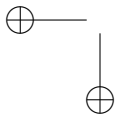


CREON

Let fancy play with judgment as it will:
But if thou fail to yield the culprit up
Thou'lt find low cunning ends its life in chains.
(Exit Creon)

CHORUS

What a thing is man! Among all wonders
The wonder of the world is man himself.
He scuds the angry pallor of the seas
Upon the blast and chariot of the storm,
Cutting a pathway through the drowned waste.
He stirs and wears the unwearable Earth –
The eldest of his gods – with shuttling ploughs
And teams that toil and turn from year to year.
Man the Contriver! Man the master-mind
That with his casting-nets
Of woven cunning snares the light-wit birds;
And savage brutes; and sea-swarms of the deep;
Yea, every wary beast that roams the hills
Hath he subdued through excellence of wit.
Beneath his eye the horse accepts the yoke
And the mad mountain bullock seeks his stall.
Man the Householder, the Resourceful,

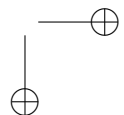
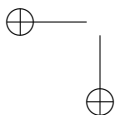




Safe from the drench of the arrowy rain
And the chill of the frozen sky; –
The Inventor of speech and soaring thought,
A match for all things, competent, victorious –
Against Death only shall he call for aid,
And call in vain.
Yea wondrous is man's Sagacity:
Through this he climbeth on high,
Through this also he falleth.
In the confidence of his power he stumbleth;
In the stubbornness of his will he goeth down.
While he honoreth the laws of the land
And that Justice which he hath sworn to maintain,
Proudly stands his city.
But when rash counsels have mastered him, he dwells
with perversity:
Such a man hath no city.
Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts,
who doeth such things.
(Enter Guard leading Antigone)

CHORUS

Is this some portent from the gods on high
Or do my eyes betray me? – 'Tis Antigone!





Child of calamity, child of Œdipus,
'Twas thou they apprehended in the crime,
In mad defiance of the King's decree!

GUARD

We caught this girl burying him. But where is Creon?
(Enter Creon)

CHORUS

See, he is coming, and upon the stroke.

CREON

How now, and what's the matter? On what stroke?

GUARD

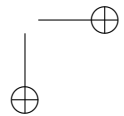
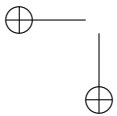
O King, men should swear nothing, lest through an afterthought they forswear themselves. When I swore not to come, I was scared by thy threats. But joy that comes in despair is the best of pleasures, and I have come, a forsworn man, bringing this maid who was taken in the act of tending the corpse. This time there were no lots cast, but the windfall is mine. And now, O King, take her and question her to thy heart's content; for I go scot-free in this cause.

CREON

Where didst thou apprehend her?

GUARD

Burying this man. Thou hast it now.





CREON

Dost understand thy words?

GUARD

I saw her bury the forbidden thing.

CREON

How did you see her? In the very act?

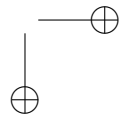
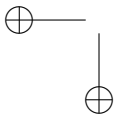
GUARD

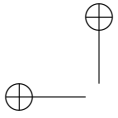
'Twas thus: – We come to the spot still trembling at thy threats, and sweep the dust from the dank body and sit down on the brow of the hill to windward, everyman wide awake and spurring his neighbor to diligence. And so it went till the sun rose and it grew hot. Then of a sudden a whirlwind of dust in the sky tore across the plain rending the foliage. We closed our eyes and endured the plague of the gods. After a long time the storm passed and the maid was seen, and she cried aloud with the sharp scream of a bird when she sees her nest stripped of its nestlings. When she saw the bared corpse she uttered wails and called down curses on those who had done it; and brought handfuls of dust and from a bronze ewer thrice poured a drink-offering upon the dead. We rushed in and closed on the quarry and taxed her with her doings and she denied nothing, at which I was glad, yet sorry. It's sad to bring trouble on a friend, but the best is to escape yourself.

CREON

(To Antigone)

You there! You there with your face to the ground, I say! Do you avow or disavow the act?





ANTIGONE

I deny nothing: I have done the deed.

CREON

(To the Guard)

Off with you where you will!

The sword of justice hangs not over thee.

(Exit Guard)

(To Antigone)

But thou! Speak briefly. Let thy words be few.

Knew'st thou the edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE

I knew it well. Why not? It was proclaimed.

CREON

But thou didst dare to violate the law?

ANTIGONE

It was not God above who framed that law,

Nor Justice, whispering from the Underworld.

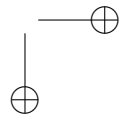
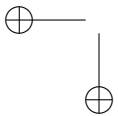
Nor deemed I thy decrees were of such force

As to o'erride the sanctities of heaven; –

Which are not of today nor yesterday.

From whom – whence they first issued, no one knows.

I was not like to scant their holy rites





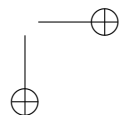
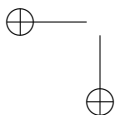
And brave the even justice of the gods
For fear of some one's edict. Die I must
Even without thy edicts: if by them,
I count my death a gain; – as who would not
Who lives encompassed with such miseries
As I do? Such a one can find in death
No sorrow, but the balm of sorrow's ending.
But had I left my brother's corpse unburied,
That would have grieved me. This afflicts me not.
And if my deed convict me of unwisdom,
Perhaps some shade of folly clouds my judge.

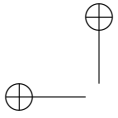
CHORUS

A raw response that shows the father's mood:
Ever head-on, no bending to the blast.

CREON

Hear me! Observe, I say! I'd have you know
That stubborn brows are those that meet the dust.
The stiffest iron, hardened in the forge,
Splinters and snaps in use. Do we not see
The foaming courser in his airy plunge
Gentled and broken by a tiny curb?
Thy self-importance ill becomes a slave.
(To the Chorus)





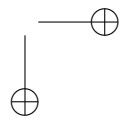
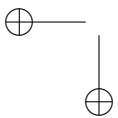
She ever had a trick of insolence
Or e'er she trampled on my last decree.
This outrage is but sequel to the rest: –
She boasts of it and glories in her deed.
Am I the man, or is this girl the man,
To win the bout and walk unscathed away?
No! Be she sister's child, or closer blood
Than all that clusters of our family
Round Zeus' inmost altar, neither she,
No, nor her sister – whom I also charge
As co-conspirator – shall 'scape the doom
For their connivance in this burial.
Go, summon her! I saw her there within
Raving – half mad.
So, oft before the deed,
The mind stands self-convicted in its treason,
When folks are plotting mischief in the dark.
It's odious when some collar'd criminal
Preens himself on the virtue of his deed.

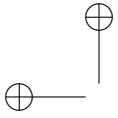
ANTIGONE

Would'st thou do more than slay me?

CREON

Not I. There ends my purpose.





ANTIGONE

Why delay?

Thy words please me but little, nor mine thee.

And how could nobler glory come to me

Than through the entombing of this brother dear?

(To the Chorus)

Ye all would praise me for't; but your lips

Are closed. Ay, truly, Kings alone are blest;

Happy in all beside, happy in this: –

'Tis Kings alone can speak their mind at will.

CREON

Thou differest from these Thebans in that view.

ANTIGONE

Eyes have they, but no tongues.

CREON

Art not ashamed to act apart from them?

ANTIGONE

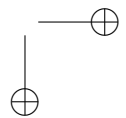
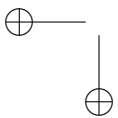
It is no shame to tend a brother's corpse.

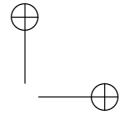
CREON

And was the other not a brother too?

ANTIGONE

One mother bare them to the selfsame sire.





CREON

Then why insult the patriot by thine act?

ANTIGONE

Being dead, he never will conceive it so.

CREON

By honoring both, thou dost dishonor him.

ANTIGONE

Nay, Hades claims her pieties for both.

CREON

But good and bad deserve not equal rites.

ANTIGONE

Who knows if it be thought so there below?

CREON

A foe is not a friend – not even in death.

ANTIGONE

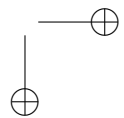
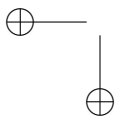
I'm linked not with their hate but in their love.

CREON

If you must love them, go to meet them there!

For while I live I'll brook no woman's rule.

(Enter Ismene led from the house by two attendants)





CHORUS

Behold Ismene in the palace gate
Pouring her sister-sorrow in a flood.
A cloud is on her brow,
And o'er the flush of grief the wash of tears
Bedims her glance.

CREON, TO ISMENE

You too! – the coiling serpent of my house
Who suck my blood in secret, while I nurse
The brace of you – agents, conspirators –
Come now, speak out! Dost thou confess thy share
In this interment – or forswear all guilt?

ISMENE

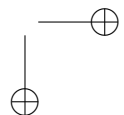
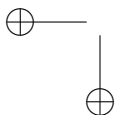
I did the deed – if she allow my claim –
And share the danger and the blame of it.

ANTIGONE

But I allow it not! – It were not just!
Thou did'st refuse and I rejected thee.

ISMENE

But in your sorrows I am not ashamed
To make myself a fellow to your pain.





ANTIGONE

I call the dead to witness! Those below
Can say who did the deed. – A friend whose love
Comes in behind with words I count as none.

ISMENE

Nay sister, do not shame me, let me die
And, dying with thee, sanctify the dead.

ANTIGONE

Thou shalt not die with me nor claim a deed,
Or death, not due thee. Mine shall serve for both.

ISMENE

And what were life to me bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon? 'Twas his edict made you pause.

ISMENE

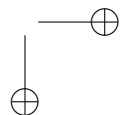
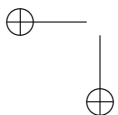
Why torture me with unavailing grief?

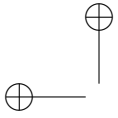
ANTIGONE

Indeed it is my anguish makes me mock thee.

ISMENE

But now, e'en now, can I not succor thee?





ANTIGONE

Be off! I do not grudge thee thy escape.

ISMENE

Woe's me! To miss the chance to share thy death!

ANTIGONE

Thy choice it was to live and mine to die.

ISMENE

It was against my protest that you chose.

ANTIGONE

Thy thoughts were on the powers that rule this world,
Mine on those yonder –

ISMENE

But I'd please them now.

ANTIGONE

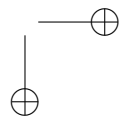
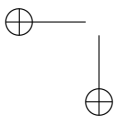
Be of good cheer. Thou livest, but my soul
Has long been stayed on death to serve the dead.

CREON

Two sisters: one of them has lost her wits,
And one was born a fool.

ISMENE

Reason takes flight before great miseries.





CREON

Thine fled through dabbling in deep villainy.

ISMENE

Her crime? Without her, life were nought to me.

CREON

No more! No more of her! She lives no more.

ISMENE

Wilt slay the affianced bride of thine own son?

CREON

There's many a wench to wed and field to till.

ISMENE

Never such plighted troth as welded these!

CREON

I'll have no evil women for my sons.

ANTIGONE

(Aside)

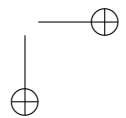
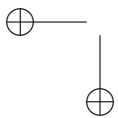
Beloved Hæmon, how thy father wrongs thee!

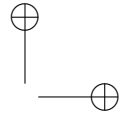
CREON

Thou and thy bridals vex – they weary me.

CHORUS

(To Creon)





Wilt thou indeed despoil thy son of her?

CREON

'Tis death that brings this bridal to its close.

CHORUS

Is it determined then that she shall die?

CREON

Determined, yes: it is my will and yours.

Let there be no delay, but take them in

And keep them close, no gadding – they are women,

And even men, and bold men, take to flight

When they see Hades stalking at their heels.

(Exeunt Attendants guarding Antigone and Ismene)

CHORUS

Happy is the man who lives in quietude

And who has not known the taste of a great affliction;

For when once a household has been shaken by heaven,

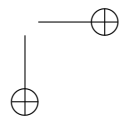
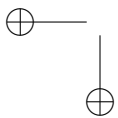
The gods desist not but beat upon that house from generation
to generation,

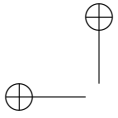
Even as the fierce sea-winds of Thrace that scour the dark
waters

Beat upon the jutting headlands,

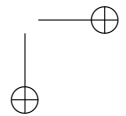
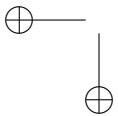
Till they roar with the shattering blows of the storm.

The child is not saved by the father's death,





For some deity strikes him down and there is none to deliver.
I see the ancient sorrows of the house of Labdacus falling in
heaps upon the sorrows of the dead.
Even now the last light fades that shone on the children of
Œdipus –
Quenched by a handful of bloody dust offered to Hades,
Quenched by a mad impulse, by a foolish speech.
O Zeus, whom neither sleep subdues nor time can master,
Who shall name thy transgressions
Or set a bound to thy power?
Ageless and timeless One,
Dwelling in the dazzling splendors of Olympus.
And now let one word of wisdom suffice you:
That greatness is the undoing of men.
'Tis his success that builds a man and ruins him:
He wanders at ease and nimbly
Till he sets his foot on unquenchable fire.
For evil seemeth good to him.
Hath it not been said of old? –
The gods have touched his wits: they would do away with him.
In a moment he will come to destruction.
(To Creon)
But lo, Hæmon, the last of thy sons, comes, grieving for the
doom of his promised bride,





And bitter for the baffled hope of his marriage.
(Enter Hæmon)

CREON

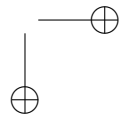
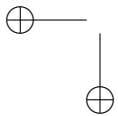
We soon shall know more than the seers can tell.
Is it, my son, the doom of thy betrothed
That brings thee raging to thy father's side,
Or dost approve me?

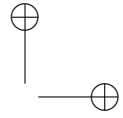
HÆMON

Father, I am thine
To follow what right counsels you propose.
No marriage is to me of greater moment
Than thy good guidance.

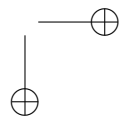
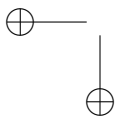
CREON

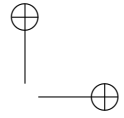
Verily, my son,
It is thy duty to submit thy heart
In all things to thy father's sentiments;
For 'tis the prayer of fathers to beget
Obedient offspring, portions of themselves,
Who shall requite the father's enemies
With evil, and his friends with love like his.
The man whose children are unprofitable
Begets a grief, a scorn, a laughing stock.





Then do not thou, my son, at pleasure's beck
Dethrone thy reason for a woman's sake –
For those embracements that so soon turn cold
Of a bad woman as a bedfellow.
Eschew this maid: she's hostile: pack her off
To Hades for a husband. Did I not
Catch her in the act of open mutiny
In lone defiance of my rule in Thebes?
Am I to walk this city as a liar?
She'll cling to Zeus' altar. Be it so!
If I shield treason in my family,
How punish aliens? – That King is just
Whose justice rules his household – next, the State.
The criminal who tramples on the law,
And thinks to dictate to his governors,
Shall have no praise from me. A lawful king
Must be obeyed in actions great and small,
Just or unjust. Your loyal citizen
Would make a royal ruler at a pinch;
And in the storm of spears would stand his ground
Steady and dauntless at a comrade's side.
But disobedience is the deadly sin
That ruins cities, desolates the home.





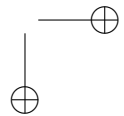
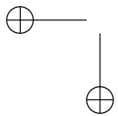
Scatters the serried ranks in headlong flight;
For in the tug of war it's discipline
That saves right-minded men. We must not, then,
Be worsted by a woman. Better fall
Man-fashion than be called a woman's man.

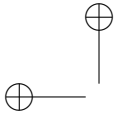
CHORUS

To us, unless our years have stol'n our wit,
Thou seemest to say wisely what thou say'st.

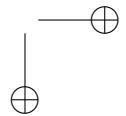
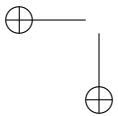
HÆMON

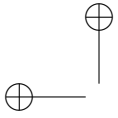
Father, it was the gods gave man his mind –
The best of his possessions. Where you err
I know not and I venture not to tell,
Nor hesitate another point of view.
But 'tis my nature's office to report
What others say or do in blame of you.
Thine eye doth lock the lips of common men
On words that might offend thee. Yet forby,
And in the dusk and shadows, I can hear
The moanings of the city for this maid,
As of all women the least justly doomed
To shameful death for actions glorious –
Who would not leave her blood-stained brother's corpse
Unburied to be eaten by the dogs





And carrion vultures. ‘Did she not,’ they ask,
‘Deserve bright honors for this golden deed?’
Such darkling rumors over-creep the town.
As for myself, when all goes well with thee,
My father, I am utterly content.
For every father is his son’s best jewel,
And every son, his father’s; and the light
That shines on one illuminates the other.
Yet cling not to thine own unchanging mood,
Nor let thy judgments be immutable.
For one who thinks that he alone is wise
In speech or mind or mood – such men as that,
Like open boxes show their emptiness.
And, for a wise man, ’tis no shame to learn.
Take note, along some icy torrent’s course
How trees that bend betimes save every twig;
While those that stiffen, perish, root and branch.
The mariner who drives ahead and never
Slacks the main sheet, will end the voyage keel-up.
Let go displeasure, and give way to change!
Young am I, yet I’ll venture on a thought: –
If man were wise by nature, that were best;
For he’d be folly-proof; but that is rare;





And therefore 'tis a virtue to give heed
To good advice.

CHORUS

O King, in all he says that's to the point,
Give him thine ear. And thou, young man, attend
Thy father's words. For both have spoken well.

CREON

A man of my age – schooled by one of his!

HÆMON

Nothing unjust in that! If I am young,
Weigh me by my deservings, not my years.

CREON

Deservings! – To befriend the runagates?

HÆMON

I urge no tenderness to evil-doers.

CREON

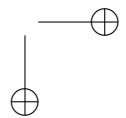
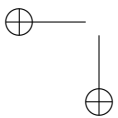
Is she not touched with just that malady?

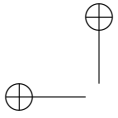
HÆMON

The whole of Thebes, and with one voice, denies it!

CREON

Is it for Thebes to tell me how to rule?





HÆMON

Behold thou speakest like a youth indeed!

CREON

Is't I or some one else that rules this land?

HÆMON

A city one man owns is not a city.

CREON

Is not a city deemed its ruler's own?

HÆMON

Call it a desert! – Thou would'st rule it well.

CREON

(To the Chorus)

This boy would seem the lady's champion.

HÆMON

And thou the lady! 'Tis thy cause I serve.

CREON

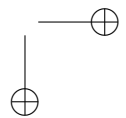
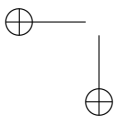
Thou shameless wretch, to wrangle with thy father!

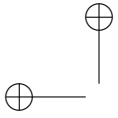
HÆMON

I could not let thee shame the cause of justice.

CREON

When I sustain a King's prerogatives?





HÆMON

Sustain! Thou tramplest on the laws of heaven.

CREON

The woman's words! – Thou art her follower!

HÆMON

But not a coward to be overawed!

CREON

At least confess thou art her advocate.

HÆMON

And yours, and mine, and of the gods above.

CREON

Thou shalt not have her while she is alive.

HÆMON

Then must she die. – Perchance not only she.

CREON

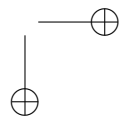
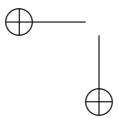
What! Dost thou dare to threaten me, rash boy?

HÆMON

It is no threat to challenge rash resolves.

CREON

Thou'lt rue the day thy wisdom tutored mine!





HÆMON

Wert not my father I'd not call thee wise.

CREON

Dost think to fawn on me, or wheedle me?

HÆMON

You wish to speak – and then hear no reply?

CREON

Is't so indeed! By heaven and all its gods,
This blast of good advice shall cost you dear.

(To the attendants)

Bring forth that spotted plague! – That she may die
Beside her bridegroom and before his eyes.

HÆMON

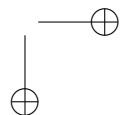
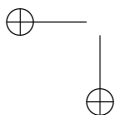
Not in my sight, for thou shalt never see
My face again. Live on, old man,
With those who can abide the sight of thee!
(Exit Hæmon)

CHORUS

The man is gone, O King, in angry haste.
Grief at his age doth often turn to wrath.

CREON

Let him foam over into deeds or dreams,





He shall not save the sisters from their doom.

CHORUS

Is it thy purpose, Sire, to kill them both?

CREON

Not her whose hands are pure; – thou sayest well.

CHORUS

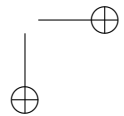
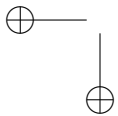
And what shall be thy sentence on the other?

CREON

Take her to where man's footstep never falls
And close her living in a rocky vault,
With so much food as piety prescribes
To keep my city uncontaminate,
There let her pray to Hades – her sole god –
To save her – if perchance he do – from death.
At least she'll learn by the experience
That 'tis lost labor to revere the dead.

CHORUS

Love unconquered who scornest earthly goods and keepst thy
vigil on the soft cheek of the maiden,
Thou roamest over the sea and in the homes of dwellers in the
wilds.
No immortal can escape thee, nor any among men whose life is
for a day;





And he to whom thou comest is mad.

Thou takest thy place enthroned in power beside the Laws;

Even there, O Aphrodite, thou workest thy unconquerable will.

Victorious is the love-kindling light from the eyes of the fair
bride:

Yea, the just themselves have their minds warped by thee to
their ruin:

It is Thou that hast stirred up this strife among the warring
children of *Œdipus*.

But now at this sight I am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty
and can no more keep back the streaming tears,

When I see *Antigone* passing to the bridal chamber where all
are laid to rest.

(*Antigone* and *Ismene* are led out guarded)

ANTIGONE

My country men – friends, neighbors, citizens,

Ye see me setting foot on my last journey,

And yonder sun shall light me never more.

For *Hades*' hand that puts the dead to sleep

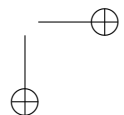
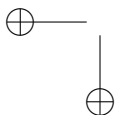
Leads me, still living, on to *Acheron*,

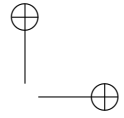
Whose shores will greet me with no nuptial carols

Nor marriage chants for one – wedded to darkness.

CHORUS

Nay, glorious woman, bright with shafts of praise





Thou sinkest to the Cavern of the Dead,
Untouched by mortal sickness or the Sword.
Yea, mistress of thy will thou goest down
As none hath ever dared or done before.

ANTIGONE

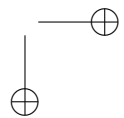
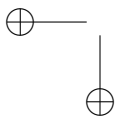
Nay, I have heard of Phrygian Niobe,
Tantalus' daughter, fastened to the face
Of dripping Sipylus and worn away
With streams that cling like ivy to the cliff,
Until the drench subdue her – dreadful death!
For rain perpetual falls, and snows forever
Waste her away, and from beneath her lids
Her tears bedew her breast – A death like hers
Comes creeping to enfold me on my couch.

CHORUS

Yea, but she was a goddess, born of gods,
And we be men and mortals; and for you
To share in death the fame of demigods,
Is fame enough.

ANTIGONE

Alas, ye mock me! By my father's gods.
Ye taunt me to my face!





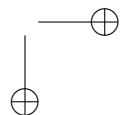
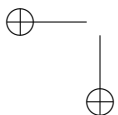
Could ye not even wait till I be gone?
Alas for Thebes, and for her wealthy sons!
O sacred streams that flow from Dirce's fount,
Ye holy precincts, fanes and groves of Thebes.
I call ye all to witness that unwept
Of friends, and guiltless of offence,
I pass to my entombment in the rock,
Utterly wretched, having neither home
On earth nor in the Underworld –
No portion with the living or the Dead.

CHORUS

Thou hast rushed forward to the utmost verge
Of daring, and against the lofty base
Of Justice' shaft hast ta'en a headlong fall
Perhaps as victim of a father's sin –

ANTIGONE

You touch the shudder that inhabits me –
The many-voiced lament for Labdacus,
And all the storied sorrows of our race;
Maternal horrors of the marriage bed!
Mother and son! My parents! Of what stock
Am I created? Yet toward them I move,
Unwedded and accursed, to share their home. –





My brother, too, whose bridal was ill-starred!
O Polyneices, 'twas thy death undid me!
'Twas the rites!

CHORUS

Piety, ay, but piety includes
A reverence for kings.
Thy ruin was self-will.

ANTIGONE

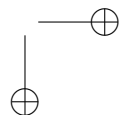
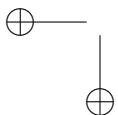
Unwept, unhymned, deserted, I set forth
Upon the lonely path prepared for me,
No more to see yon blessed eye of heaven
Or hear a friend bemoan Antigone.

CREON

Let wailing cease! If songs and shrieks availed
To stay the doom, there'd be no end to them.
Away with her at once and wall her up
As I commanded you; and leave her there
Buried alive, to live or die at will.
Whate'er the out-come be, our hands are clean.
The condemnation is but this: – Her share
In the bright world above is blotted out.

ANTIGONE

O bridal chamber caverned in the rock,

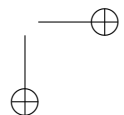
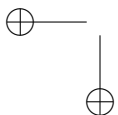




Eternal prison, tomb and dwelling place,
Whither, to meet my many ancestors –
Whom, 'midst the Dead, Persephone received –
I take my steps, the last to come to her,
And far the most unhappy – still alive.
And yet I feel my coming will be welcome
To father and to thee, my mother dear,
And welcome, my heart tells me, brother, to thee.
For when you died I washed and tended you
And poured drink-offerings upon your grave.
And, Polyneices, 'tis for those fond rites
O'er thy dead body I am treated thus.
What law of heaven had I disobeyed?
And how toward heaven can I look for help
Or ask divinity to hear her cry
Whose piety has earned her infamy?
Yea, if the gods approve this punishment,
In suffering I shall come to know my sin;
And if the sin be found in the other scale,
I wish no greater suffering to my judges
Than this they most unjustly mete to me.

CHORUS

Still the same gusts and tempests of the soul.





CREON

It is the guards who let her take her time;
And they shall smart for it.

ANTIGONE

Behind that word stalks Death.

CREON

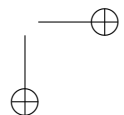
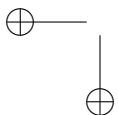
I have no better word to comfort thee:
The doom will be fulfilled.

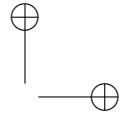
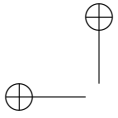
ANTIGONE

O land of Thebes, O city of my race,
They lead me on – there is no more delay.
Ye gods that did beget us! Done to death!
The last, the only princess of your race,
Because she would not slight your sacraments
And dared not cast away the fear of heaven.
(Antigone is led out under guard)

CHORUS

Have patience, O my daughter, yet a while;
For upon the children of the gods fall the afflictions of heaven.
Did not Danaë lose the light of day in her dark tower;
And was not her marriage couch hid in a grave?
Like thee she was the daughter of kings:

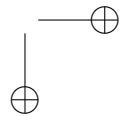
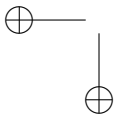




She garnered the seed of Zeus: She harvested the golden grain.
Cease then to trouble thyself; for behind the shadows worketh
Destiny –
The dreaded Power that guideth all;
And from it there is no deliverance.
Let the fate of another console thee:
Remember the son of Dryas, King of the Edonians,
How a god penned him in a rocky prison;
For by his taunts he had angered Dionysus.
Yet in the stillness of his solitude his madness left him,
And he learned to know the deity and to repent of his mockeries.
For he had sought to quell the divine frenzy of the Bacchanalian
fire;
He had angered the muses who love the flute.
Hearken yet once more, and I will speak to thy comfort: –
By the waters of the Dark Rocks on the shores of the Bosphorus
Dwelt Cleopatra, a princess, child of Boreas, wife of Phineus;
Her sons were blinded for a season,
Yet a god restored their sight.
Upon her also the gray fates bore hard, my daughter.
(Enter Teiresias, led by a boy, upon the spectator's right)

TEIRESIAS

Princes of Thebes, we come with linked steps,
As the blind must – for two must walk as one.





CREON

Aged Teiresias, what is thy news?

TEIRESIAS

I come to tell it. Do thou lend thine ear.

CREON

Thou hast not found me heedless heretofore.

TEIRESIAS

'Twas that that made thee steer thy state aright.

CREON

I know it, and I thank thee for the aid.

TEIRESIAS

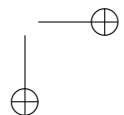
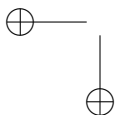
Thy footfall edges on a precipice.

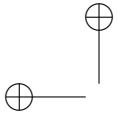
CREON

What do you mean? I tremble at the word.

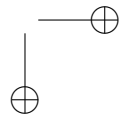
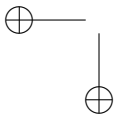
TEIRESIAS

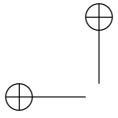
If you will trust my learning, you shall know.
Seated in my old shrine of augury,
Where the birds muster round my watching-post,
I heard an unknown language of the fowls,
Screams, agonies, and brutish guttural sounds;
And knew by this and by the whirr of wings





That murder was at work with beak and claw.
Forthwith I fearfully applied the torch
To a trimmed altar; but no flame went up.
Dank moisture trickled from the oozing flesh
Upon the embers – sputtered and died out.
The gall was scattered, and the steaming thighs
Were bared of their enclosing layer of fat.
This evil outcome of my augury
Was told me by the boy. My guide is he,
And I am guide to others. – In one word: –
Thy counsels have brought sickness on the state.
The altars of our cities, and our hearths
Have one and all been tainted by the dogs
And birds that drip with carrion from the corpse;
And at our hand the gods no more accept
Prayer, offering, or flame of sacrifice.
Nor doth a bird give back a note of joy;
For all have tasted of the slaughtered thing.
Therefore, my son, take heed; for every man
May trip; but he's the wise and happy man
Who, when he errs, lays wisdom to the wound,
And is not obdurate-immovable,
But shuns the after-error of self-will.

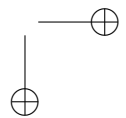
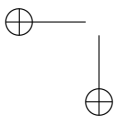


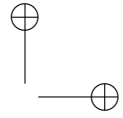
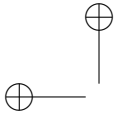


Concede the dead man's claim, nor stab a corpse!
It is a dubious fear to slay the slain.
I tell my carefullest thought in care for thee;
And good advice is sweetest when it brings
Advantage in its hand.

CREON

Desist, old man!
Ye shoot at me like archers at the butts:
Ye practise on me with your auguries.
'Tis I that am your trade, your merchandise,
Your gains, your gold, your myrrh, your India.
Go seek for profits in the Orient.
Ye shall not bury or entomb this man.
No! Not though Zeus' eagles feed on him
And bear the morsels to their master's throne.
No, your defilements do not terrify;
Nor will I brook this burial; for I know
That no man living can pollute the gods.
Enough! – But one word more. I'd have you know
That many an able man has come to grief –
Mark what I say, old man! – for wrapping up
A shameless piece of business in fine words.





TEIRESIAS

If men would but consider – if they knew –

CREON

What have we now? What's the next commonplace?

TEIRESIAS

The way to win is wisely to advise.

CREON

I say so too – Man's folly is his bane.

TEIRESIAS

'Tis a disease that fills thee to the brim.

CREON

I'll not refute a prophet with a taunt.

TEIRESIAS

And yet you say my prophecies are false.

CREON

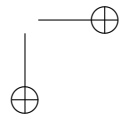
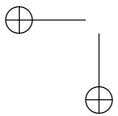
Indeed, the prophets are a greedy race.

TEIRESIAS

And kings from greedy tyrants draw their blood.

CREON

I am the Overlord! Dost understand?





TEIRESIAS

Yes, and through me thy city shall be saved.

CREON

Thou seekest silver with a silver tongue.

TEIRESIAS

Thou'lt rouse me to divulge the mysteries!

CREON

Out with them – They're the feathers of thy nest.

TEIRESIAS

Thy nest shall certainly be newly set.

CREON

Thou shalt not gain a ha'penny. Take that!

TEIRESIAS

Take this to heart, then! – Thou shalt scarcely see

The chariot of the over-coursing sun

But once or twice, when one begot by thee

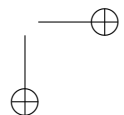
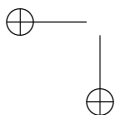
To thee shall be delivered, corpse for corpse,

Because thou hast most ruthlessly thrust down

The children of the sunlight to the shades,

And lodged a living woman in the tomb.

E'en now thou keep'st a dead man from his rites,

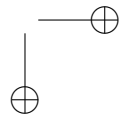
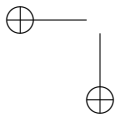


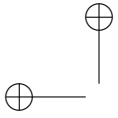


Dishonoring the dreaded gods below,
And they are outraged at the violence.
Therefore the Furies lie in wait for thee;
Destroyers and Avengers are let loose
From Hades' confines and from heaven above,
To pour thy very deeds upon thy head.
Mark well the gains that glitter in my trade –
The fates that tread behind my augury.
I hear the wail of women in thy house,
In all thy cities tumult, and a cry
For mangled sons who had their burial
From dogs and savage beasts, or some wild bird
That bore his carrion breath to every hearth
In every city where a hearth was found.
So much for thee! The archer at the butts
Has loosed his shaft: it quivers in the pin.
Boy, lead me home, that he may spend his wrath
On younger men and learn
Some wiser mood than now possesses him.
(Exit Teiresias and boy)

CHORUS

The man is gone, O King. His prophecies
Are ominous. Yet since the hair grew white





Upon my brow, our city heretofore
Has found his words come true.

CREON

I know it well,
And am myself perplexed. 'Tis hard to yield;
But to resist, and meet the stroke of fate
Is harder still.

CHORUS

Son of Meneceus, take the wiser course.

CREON

What must I do, then? Speak, I will obey.

CHORUS

Go thou and free the maiden from the rock
And build a tomb for the unburied dead.

CREON

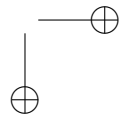
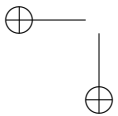
This is thy counsel – that I should give way?

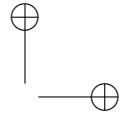
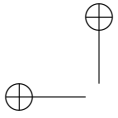
CHORUS

Ay, and with speed; for heaven's punishments
Are swifter than the follies they rebuke.

CREON

Woe's me! It's true! I give my purpose up.
I'll not make war on fate.





CHORUS

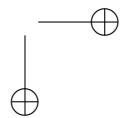
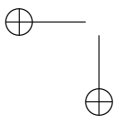
Do it thyself.

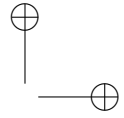
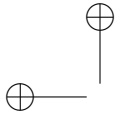
CREON

Behold me! On, men, on, and instantly!
Fetch axes to the place. It's there beyond!
'Twas I that fastened her, and I myself
Will set her free. The laws of heaven
Are over all, and all must honor them.
(Exeunt Creon and attendants)

CHORUS

O Dionysus, Ruler, Friend and Guide,
Come to our aid ! We need thee in this hour.
Offspring of Zeus, Child of a Theban bride,
Show us thy saving power.
Italia's Guardian and Overlord,
By many a name, in many a land adored
When dark Eleusis throws her portals wide,
'Twas Thebes who first confessed thy power divine
Where Cadmus harvested the Dragon's teeth,
And sweet Ismene wanders by beneath
The peaks from which thy smoky torches shine
Along the mountainside.
The mother-city of thy deity

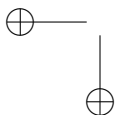


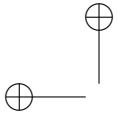


Hath need of thee!
O Dionysus, Ruler, Friend and Guide,
Come to our aid.
Thou Sovereign of the voiceful night
With fire-breathing cressets bright,
Child of Zeus, whose joyous throng
Dance in midnight frenzied song,
Bringer of happiness to men –
Saviour, show thy face again!
(Enter Messenger on spectator's left)

MESSENGER

Ye men of Thebes and dwellers in the land
Of Cadmus and Amphion, hear my tale!
I see in mortal life no constant thing
To praise or blame, save mutability.
For Fortune sets men up and throws them down
In honor or disgrace from day to day:
Nothing that is established is secure.
Creon, as I had thought, was Fortune's darling:
He saved this land of Cadmus from its foes,
Mastered the monarchy and guided it –
With bliss of noble offspring doubly crowned.
Now all is lost; for when man's joy is dead





I count the man as but a breathing corpse.
Say thou hast riches, say thou art a King,
If joy be banished, I'd not weigh thy state
As worth the passing shadow of a cloud –
Compared to heartsease.

CHORUS

What new catastrophe dost thou report?

MESSENGER

Death: and the living are the guilty cause.

CHORUS

Who was the killer, and who bit the dust?

MESSENGER

Hæmon lies slaughtered – by no stranger's hand.

CHORUS

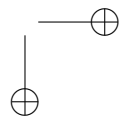
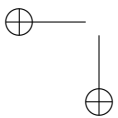
His father's or his own?

MESSENGER

He slew himself
In wrath against his father's murd'rous deed.

CHORUS

Prophet of ill, thou hast made good thy word.





MESENTER

Therefore take thought for what is best to do.

CHORUS

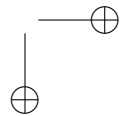
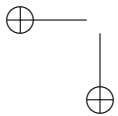
I see Eurydice, the hapless wife
Of Creon coming hither from the house.
Perhaps she knows the tidings of her son.
(Enter Eurydice)

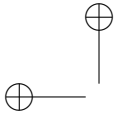
EURYDICE

People of Thebes, I heard you murmuring
As I was passing through the castle hall
To kneel in prayer to Pallas at her shrine.
Just as I laid my hand upon the gate
A sound of household wailing reached my ear.
Then terror smote my senses. At full length
I fell. My women caught me in their arms.
But tell the tale, my man, and I shall listen
As one not unaccustomed to bad news.

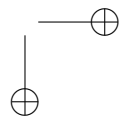
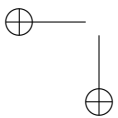
MESENTER

My sovereign, I will witness what I saw
And not hold back a syllable of the truth.
For why should I console thee with soft words
And then be proved a liar? Truth is best.



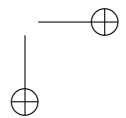
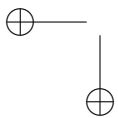


I was thy husband's guide across the plain
To where the dog-torn and unpitied corpse
Of Polyneices lay. And there we knelt
In prayer to Pluto and to Hecaté,
Who guard the highways, to avert their wrath.
We washed him sacredly, and gathering twigs
Solemnly burned the relics that were there,
And rounded up a barrow from the soil
That was his native earth; then turned and sought
The maiden's nuptial chamber in the rock –
The caverned mansion of the Bride of Death.
Then from afar a sharp and bitter cry,
As from that dark, unhallowed bridal-tomb,
Was heard by one of us, who told the king;
And, as we all drew nearer, broken sounds
And grieving voices floated round the king.
He gave a groan of anguish and cried out
"This is the woofullest journey of my life!
Wretch that I am! And do my dreams come true?
My son's voice greets me. Run, ye fellows, run!
And when ye reach the tomb, pass through the gap
Where it is broken – down to the tomb below,
And tell me if the voice be Hæmon's voice,





Or phantom shouts the gods have sent to mock me.”
Stung by the motionings of his despair,
We sought the inner chamber of the rock
And found the maiden hanging. Round her neck
Her gauzy veil of India was noosed;
And he was there, his arms about her waist,
Weeping and wailing for a murdered bride,
A father’s deeds and love eclipsed in woe.
And then the groaning father from without
Approached him, crying loud and bitterly,
“O wretched, wretched boy, what hast thou done!
Thy grief hath made thee mad. Come forth, my son,
I pray, I beg, I supplicate” – The son,
Eyeing him closely with a glance that blazed,
Scowled in his face, but answered never a word;
Drew his cross-hilted sword, but missed the stroke
His fleeing father dodged – and in disgust.
Wroth with himself, he leans upon his sword
And drives it half its length into his side.
Then, while sense lingered, in a faint embrace
He clasped the maiden, and his agony
Stained her pale cheek with rapid streams of blood.
Corpse upon corpse they lie, a nuptial pair –





Poor youth – not here but in the Halls of Death –
In witness that of all the ills of Man
Ill Counsel is the worst.
(Eurydice retires)

CHORUS

What think you? – For the lady has withdrawn
Without a word. What is your augury?

MESSENGER

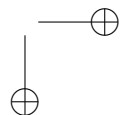
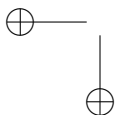
I am amazed myself, yet have good hope
She means to shroud her sorrow from the town
And set the handmaids to their mournful task.
For she's experienced and competent.

CHORUS

The portent of a stubborn silent grief
Has oft proved darker than a burst of woe.

MESSENGER

It is indeed my thought –
Excessive silence in a heart o'ercharged
Is dangerous. I'll follow her and learn
What hidden purpose labors in her breast.
(Enter Creon on the spectators' left with attendants carrying
the shrouded body of Hæmon on a bier)





CHORUS

Lo, yonder comes the King, and at his side
The work of no man's madness save his own.

CREON

Behold, ye see the slayer and the slain
Father and son – sin, death, and punishment –
The outcome of my blindness and self-will.
Alas, my son, my son, thou art cut off
In youth – untimely – guiltless –
Not for thy sin or folly, but mine own.

CHORUS

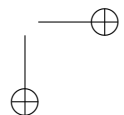
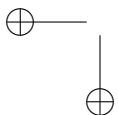
The hour of thine awakening is late.

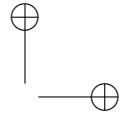
CREON

A bitter lesson! 'Twas some god above
That smote me heavily – hurtling me along
Through miseries, and trampling on my joys.
Alas, alas! – the sufferings of men!
(Enter Messenger from the palace)

MESSENGER

(To Creon)
O King whate'er thou lack'st, 'twill not be grief.
Beneath thy hand I see a part of it
And in the palace yonder, goodly store.





CREON

Must new woes follow on the heels of woe?

MESSENGER

The queen is dead, true mother to yon corpse;
The wretched lady welters in her blood.

CREON

O all-engulfing Hades, dost thou seize me,
Sending forth desperate signals of new woe
For one already dead? – What is it, boy?

CHORUS

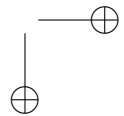
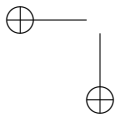
Look over there! It lies beneath your eyes.
(The doors of the palace are thrown open and the body of
Eurydice is exposed)

CREON

New shapes of horror crowd upon my sight.
What next! What next!
But now I lifted Hæmon in my arms,
And now another corpse!
Alas, alas – his mother – O my wife!
Alas, alas, my Son!

MESSENGER

There on the altar-steps she poured a prayer





For old Megareus and his sainted death,
And one for him who lies beneath your hand;
Then stabbed herself, and with her latest breath
Invoked the wrath of heaven on thy head
For murdering thy children.

CREON

I feel the curse. Will no one strike me dead?

MESSENGER

'Tis time. She laid both murders at your door.

CREON

How did she kill herself – so bloodily?

MESSENGER

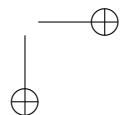
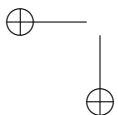
She heard the tragic story of her son
And straightway drove a dagger to her heart.

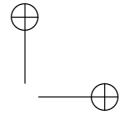
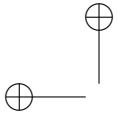
CREON

'Twas I, 'twas I that slew thee, O my son!
I own it: I proclaim it! All the guilt
Is on my head – with none to share it.
Let me be outcast. O make rid of me!
My life is worse than death – Lead me away!

CHORUS

'Tis your best course: the best and briefest too: –





If best there be when all is at the worst.

CREON

O let it come – the day that closes day!
O for that happy stroke of destiny
That hides me from the sun!

CHORUS

'Twill be as't shall be in the time to come.

CREON

I pray for death, for death and only death!

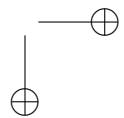
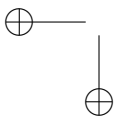
CHORUS

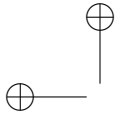
Pray thou no more. No mortal can escape
The apportioned sorrows of his destiny.

CREON

Off with me then! – a rash and worthless man,
Unhappy wretch! I slew thee, O my son!
And thee my wife! – I know not where to turn
Or where to lean – all goes awry with me.
Fate leaps upon me in an avalanche.
Lead me along: I follow.

(As Creon is being conducted into the house the chorus leader
speaks the closing verses)





CHORUS

Wisdom brings happiness: The Fear of Heaven
Is Guide and Guardian of all earthly truth.

THE END

