

Sophocles (c. 496–c. 406 B.C.)

F + F

ANTIGONE

(ANTIGONE & ISMENE)

441 B.C.

TRANSLATED BY DUDLEY FITTS AND ROBERT FITZGERALD

Characters

ANTIGONE, } daughters of Oedipus
 ISMENE, }
 EURYDICE, wife of Kreon
 KREON, King of Thebes
 HAIMON, son of Kreon
 TEIRESIAS, a blind seer
 A SENTRY
 A MESSENGER
 CHORUS

Scene: Before the palace of Kreon, King of Thebes. A central double door, and two lateral doors. A platform extends the length of the facade, and from this platform three steps lead down into the orchestra, or chorus-ground.

Time: Dawn of the day after the repulse of the Argive army from the assault on Thebes.

START HERE

PROLOGUE°

(Antigone and Ismene enter from the central door of the palace.)

ANTIGONE: Ismene, dear sister,
 You would think that we had already suffered
 enough
 For the curse on Oedipus.°

[Note: The line numbers to the original Greek text are cited in brackets at the top of the page.]

Prologue: Portion of the play explaining the background and current action. 3. **curse on Oedipus:** Oedipus, King of Thebes and the father of Antigone and Ismene, had been abandoned by his parents as an infant after the oracle foretold that he would one day kill his father and marry his mother. Rescued by a shepherd and raised by the king of Corinth, Oedipus returned years later to Thebes and unknowingly lived out the oracle's prophecy by killing Laios and marrying Iokaste. After his two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, killed each other in combat, the throne went to Kreon, Iokaste's brother.

I cannot imagine any grief
 That you and I have not gone through. And
 now —
 Have they told you of the new decree of our
 King Kreon?

ISMENE: I have heard nothing: I know
 That two sisters lost two brothers, a double
 death
 In a single hour; and I know that the Argive
 army
 Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.
 ANTIGONE: I thought so. And that is why I wanted
 you

To come out here with me. There is something
 we must do.

ISMENE: Why do you speak so strangely?

ANTIGONE: Listen, Ismene:

Kreon buried our brother Eteocles
 With military honors, gave him a soldier's
 funeral,
 And it was right that he should; but Polyneices,
 Who fought as bravely and died as miserably, —
 They say that Kreon has sworn
 No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him,
 But his body must lie in the fields, a sweet
 treasure

For carrion birds to find as they search for food.
 That is what they say, and our good Kreon is
 coming here

To announce it publicly, and the penalty —
 Stoning to death in the public square!

There it is,

And now you can prove what you are:
 A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

ISMENE: Antigone, you are mad! What could I
 possibly do?

ANTIGONE: You must decide whether you will help
 me or not.

ISMENE: I do not understand you. Help you in
 what?

ANTIGONE: Ismene, I am going to bury him. Will
 you come?

ISMENE: Bury him! You have just said the new law
 forbids it.

ANTIGONE: He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

ISMENE: But think of the danger! Think what Kreon will do!

ANTIGONE: Kreon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

ISMENE: Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him

For what his own search brought to light, his eyes

Ripped out by his own hand; and Iocaste died, His mother and wife at once: she twisted the cords

That strangled her life; and our two brothers died, Each killed by the other's sword. And we are left:

But oh, Antigone.

Think how much more terrible than these Our own death would be if we should go against Kreon

And do what he has forbidden! We are only women,

We cannot fight with men, Antigone!

The law is strong, we must give in to the law In this thing, and in worse. I beg the Dead

To forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield To those in authority. And I think it is dangerous business

To be always meddling.

ANTIGONE: If that is what you think, I should not want you, even if you asked to come.

You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be.

But I will bury him; and if I must die, I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down With him in death, and I shall be as dear To him as he to me.

It is the dead, Not the living, who make the longest demands: We die for ever.

You may do as you like, Since apparently the laws of the gods mean nothing to you.

ISMENE: They mean a great deal to me; but I have no strength

To break laws that were made for the public good.

ANTIGONE: That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me,

I will bury the brother I love.

ISMENE: Antigone, I am so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE: You need not be: You have yourself to consider, after all.

ISMENE: But no one must hear of this, you must tell no one!

I will keep it a secret, I promise!

ANTIGONE: O tell it! Tell everyone! Think how they'll hate you when it all comes out

If they learn that you knew about it all the time!

ISMENE: So fiery! You should be cold with fear.

ANTIGONE: Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must.

ISMENE: But can you do it? I say that you cannot.

ANTIGONE: Very well: when my strength gives out, I shall do no more.

ISMENE: Impossible things should not be tried at all.

ANTIGONE: Go away, Ismene:

I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will too,

For your words are hateful. Leave me my foolish plan:

I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death, It will not be the worst of deaths — death without honor.

ISMENE: Go then, if you feel that you must.

You are unwise,

But a loyal friend indeed to those who love you.

(Exit into the palace. Antigone goes off, left. Enter the Chorus.)

END

PARODOS° • Strophe° 1

CHORUS: Now the long blade of the sun, lying Level east to west, touches with glory Thebes of the Seven Gates. Open, unlidded Eye of golden day! O marching light Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream,° Striking the white shields of the enemy Thrown headlong backward from the blaze of morning!

CHORAGOS:° Polyneices their commander Roused them with windy phrases, He the wild eagle screaming Insults above our land, His wings their shields of snow, His crest their marshalled helms.

Parodos: The song or ode chanted by the Chorus on their entry. Strophe: Song sung by the Chorus as they danced from stage right to stage left. 5. Dirce's stream: River near Thebes. 8. Choragos: Leader of the Chorus.