

**Sophocles. *Antigone*. Translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994.**

Sophocles (496-406 B.C.) was, along with Aeschylus and Euripides, one of the three great playwrights of Athens. Sophocles, in addition to writing plays and poetry, served in public administration through much of his adult life. Sophocles died just before the end of the disastrous (for Athens) Peloponnesian War.

Antigone and her sister Ismene, daughters of dead king Oedipus, lament the deaths of their two brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, by one another's hands during Polynices's attempt to seize control of Thebes with the help of the rival Argives. Creon, their uncle, has in his fury with Polynices, forbidden the Thebans from burying the corpse of Polynices, rather leaving it where it fell to be shredded by birds and dogs.

Antigone intends to bury her brother and die at the hands of the new king Creon, rather than disobey divine ritual regarding her brother's body. Ismene cannot face such public scorn, and declines to assist Antigone.

A guard tells Creon that someone has surreptitiously buried Polynices with ritual ablutions performed. Creon, enraged that his command has been disobeyed, accuses the guards themselves of being bribed to bury the traitor. The guard warns King Creon of the dangers of believing falsehoods. The chorus sings a paean to mankind's wonders, but warns that man sometimes does evil.

Antigone enters with a guard. She confesses that she buried Polynices. To Antigone, it was better to die at the hand of men than to flaunt the commands of the gods. Creon condemns not only Antigone, who is his son's fiancée, but also Ismene for plotting with Antigone. Ismene confesses her involvement, but Antigone objects that Ismene refused to participate in the forbidden burial. Antigone and Ismene are taken away for execution. The chorus warns of the perils of wealth and power, dangers that do not trouble the poor.

Creon's son, Haemon, engaged to Antigone, approaches his father delicately. He notes that the city disapproves Creon's condemnation of Antigone, and asks Creon to reconsider his judgment. The wise learn and admit their errors. The chorus advises moderation, finding merit in both men's words. Creon and Haemon argue bitterly, and Haemon warns Creon that he will lose a loved one if Creon persists in his obstinance. Haemon leaves, vowing never to return. Creon fumes.

Creon reconsiders his order to execute Ismene, but orders Antigone entombed alive. The chorus warns that love is indomitable, and those experiencing it mad. Antigone delivers a final soliloquy, and the chorus rebukes her for her willful disobedience of the king. Creon hears, and orders her out of the palace. Antigone reaffirms her preference to obey gods before kings.

Tiresias, Creon's aged prophet and valued adviser, warns Creon that his stubbornness makes him blunder. The friends argue, and Tiresias reiterates the warning that Creon will lose loved ones in this debacle. Tiresias departs, angry and unheeded.

The chorus convinces Creon to relent. Creon moves to release Antigone.

A messenger arrives, announcing to the chorus that Haemon has killed himself. Eurydice, mother of Haemon and wife of Creon, asks what events have transpired. The messenger recounts that Creon buried the corpse of Polynices with appropriate ritual, and moved to release Antigone. When Antigone's jail-tomb was opened, Creon saw Antigone hung by her own hand, and his grief-stricken son, clinging to her. Creon begged Haemon to depart, but Haemon drove a sword into his side, despite Creon's efforts to save Haemon. Eurydice receives this news with unnatural calm, and departs. The chorus notes that tight-lipped silence, under these circumstances, is ominous. The messenger departs.

Creon enters laboring with the body of Haemon. He castigates himself. The messenger returns. Eurydice is dead; she stabbed herself at the divine altar, just below the liver, to share her son's pain. Creon prays for death, but the chorus tells him that will not be soon forthcoming. Wisdom never chooses neglect of divine commands. The disobedient are punished frightfully. Their lashes may, as the impudent age, teach them wisdom.