Sophocles, *Antigone*, c. 442 BC
Complete text available at http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/ant/antigstruct.htm

Beginning of Play
Scene and Time: The area before the royal house of Thebes at the break of day (16).

**Antigone**

O common one of the same womb, head of Ismene,
do you know of any suffering of those from Oedipus
that Zeus is yet to fulfill for us two yet living?
Nothing painful, nothing †without ruin†,
no disgrace, no dishonor exists 5
that I have not seen among your evils and mine.
And now, what is this proclamation they say
the general† just laid down for the whole city?
Do you know, have you heard, or are you unaware that
evils worthy of enemies are marching down on philoi?10

**Ismene**

No word of philoi, Antigone,
sweet or painful, has come to me since
we two were deprived of our two brothers,
each dead on one day by the other's hand.
Since the Argive army left15
last night,† I know nothing further
whether I am fortunate or ruined more.

**Antigone**

I thought as much. That is why I kept calling† you outside
the courtyard gates so you would be alone when you heard.

**Ismene**

What is it? Clearly, you are deeply blue over some word.† 20

**Antigone**

Why not? A tomb--has not Creon honored one of our
two brothers with one and dishonored the other without one?†
Eteocles, as they say, †with just
use of justice† and custom, he has hidden
beneath the earth, honored among the dead below.† 25
But as for the corpse of Polynoeices who perished wretchedly,
they say that proclamation has been sent forth to the citizens
that no one cover it with a tomb or bewail it,
but let it lie unmourned, unentombed, a sweet treasury
for birds looking upon it for meat.30
Such proclamations they say the good Creon
has decreed for you and me--me I say.
He is coming here to proclaim this clearly
to whoever does not know, and he considers it no small
matter. For anyone who does any of these things, 35
murder by public stoning in the city is ordained.
Now, this is the way it is for you, and you will show quickly
whether you are of noble birth or base born from good stock.\(^{(20)}\)

**Ismene**
What can I do, wretched one, if things are
in this state, by loosening or tightening the knot?\(^{(21)}\)

**Antigone**
See whether you will join in the toil and the deed with me.

**Ismene**
What dangerous enterprise? What ever are you thinking?

**Antigone**
Whether you will lift the corpse with this hand?

**Ismene**
What? Do you intend to perform rites for it, a thing forbidden the city?

**Antigone**
For my brother, certainly, and yours, if you will not.45
I for one will not be caught betraying him.\(^{(22)}\)

**Ismene**
Headstrong! When Creon has forbidden it?

**Antigone**
He has no part in keeping me from what is mine.

**Ismene**
Ah me! think, sister, how father,
died on the two of us, hated and disgraced, 50
when driven by self-discovered offenses, he pierced
both his eyes with a self-inflicting hand.
Then his mother and wife--a twofold name--
mistreated her life with twisted nooses.
And thirdly, two brothers in one day, 55
the wretched pair, worked a common fate by killing
themselves with hands turned upon one another.
Now in turn, we two left all alone, consider
how badly we will perish, if in violence of the law
we transgress the decree and power of absolute rulers. 60
No, we two women must keep in mind we were born
women whose purpose is not to battle against men.(24)
Then, because we are ruled by those who are stronger,
we must hear and obey this and things yet more painful.
As for me, begging those below for pardon, since I am being forced in this,
I will yield to those in authority,
for acting in excess has no sense.

**Antigone**
And I would not ask you, and if you wish
in the future, you would not gladly do anything with me.70
No, be whatever seems best to you. That one
I shall give rites. It is noble for me to die doing this.
I shall lie with him, phil with philo,
after I have done anything and everything holy, since far longer
is the time I must please those below than those here. 75
I shall lie there forever. You, if you think it best,
hold in dishonor the honored things of the gods.

**Ismene**
I am doing them no dishonor, but I am incapable
by my nature of acting in violence of the citizens.

**Antigone**
You can make excuses, but I shall go, 80
heap up a mound for a most philo brother.(26)

**Ismene**
Ah me! unhappy one, how I fear for you.

**Antigone**
Do not be afraid for me. Set straight the course of your own fate.(27)

**Ismene**
Please, do not tell anyone what you are doing.
Keep it secret, and I will do the same. 85

**Antigone**
Ah me! Tell everybody. You will be more hostile
if you keep silent and do not proclaim this to everyone.

**Ismene**
You have a hot heart for cold things.
Antigone
No, I know I am pleasing those I should most please.

Ismene
If you can, but no, you lust for what is beyond your means.90

Antigone
Well, when my strength fails, I shall cease once for all.(28)

Ismene
From the outset, to hunt for what is beyond your means is not fitting.

Antigone
If you say this, you will be hated by me
and justly be deemed an enemy to the one dead.
No, let me and the foolish counsel I offer 95
suffer something dreadful, but I shall not
suffer anything that will keep me from dying nobly.

NEXT SCENE

Chorus of Theban Elders [singing]
Ray of the sun, the most 100
beautiful light of lights ever
to appear to Thebes of seven gates,
you appeared at last, O eyelid
of a golden day. Over Dirce's(30)
streams you came, and 105
the man shielded in white,
come from Argos in full armor,
you propelled into headlong flight
with your bridle gleaming brightly.(31)

Coryphaeus [reciting]
Stirred up against our land110
through Polynieces' contentious quarrels,(32)
screaming shrilly,
he flew into our land like an eagle,(33)
covered in snow-white wings
amid weapons manifold and115
helmets crested with horse-hair.

Chorus of Theban Elders [singing]
Arresting flight above our houses,
threatening with blood thirsting spears
in a circle the mouth of our seven gates,
he departed before he sated 120
his jaws with our blood,
before Hephaestus' pinewood blaze seized our corona of towers.
Such was the din of Ares that strove against his back, 125
a din hard for the dragon's foe to subdue.

For Zeus exceedingly hates
the boasts of a big mouth, and seeing them
coming on with a mighty flow,
in haughtiness of ringing gold, 130
he hurls the brandished fire at him who was already rushing to scream victory
at his finish line high on our battlements.

Coryphaeus [reciting]
Swung outward, he fell on ground that repelled him,
the fire-bringer who, till then, was reveling 135
in frenzied bacchic onslaught
and breathing the blasts of most hostile winds.
But things went another way.
Smiting heavily, he apportioned
one doom for this one, another for that one,
mighty Ares, our trace-horse on the right. 140

Seven captains at seven gates,
marshaled as equal against equal, left
behind bronze homage for Zeus Turner, except the pair filled with hate who, born
of one father and one mother, leveled mutually 145
victorious spears against one another and gained,
both of them, a share in a common death.

But since Victory has come, Victory who brings renown,
who reflects back to chariot-rich Thebes its own joy,
distanced from the recent wars, 150
now clothe yourself in forgetfulness.
Let us go to all the gods' temples
in all-night dancing.
May earth-shaking
Bacchus of Thebes be our leader.

[Enter Creon, attended by slaves (491)]

Coryphaeus
Here the king of the domain, 155
†Creon, son of Menoeceus† . . . new(42)
in the new chances of the gods,
is coming. What cleverness is he rowing
that, by common proclamation,
he has set forth(43) this special assembly 160
of old men for discussion.

Creon
Gentlemen, the gods who heaved and tossed the city
on high seas have set its affairs straight again.
You I have summoned by messengers apart from the rest
because I know well that you always revered the power 165
of Laius' throne, and again when Oedipus righted the city
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and when he was destroyed, you still continued
with steadfast thoughts toward their(44) children.
Since they perished in a twofold fate 170
in one day, striking and being struck
with murderous pollution among kinsmen,
I hold all the power and throne
according to nearness of kin to the dead.(45)

Now, there is no way to learn thoroughly the essence 175
of the whole man as well as his thought and judgment
until he has been seen engaged in ruling and making laws.
For, in my opinion, whoever, in guiding a whole city,
does not adhere to the best counsels,
but from fear of something keeps his tongue locked, 180
that man seems to me now and before this to be most evil.
Whoever deems a philos more important
than his fatherland, this man I say is nowhere.
I for one--may Zeus who always sees all know this--
ever would I keep silent on seeing ruin185
approaching the citizens instead of safety,
neither would I ever regard as my philos
an enemy of the land, since I am aware that
this land is the one who carries us safely and,
while sailing upon her upright, we make our philoi.190
By these laws do I enlarge the city.

Now, I have issued proclamations, brothers to these laws
for the citizens concerning the children of Oedipus.
Eteocles, who perished fighting for this city,
fully proving his bravery in the spear battle,195
let them conceal him with a tomb and perform all the rites
that go to the bravest dead below.
The kindred blood of this man, Polyneices I mean, the exile who, on returning home, wanted to burn his fatherland and the temples of his family's gods from top to bottom 200 with flames, and wanted to taste common blood, and lead the rest into slavery, this person, it has been proclaimed to the city that no one honor with a tomb or lament with cries, but let him lie unburied, his body devoured by birds 205 and by dogs and mangled for the seeing.
Such is my thought. Never by me, at any rate, will evil men have precedence of honor over just men. But whoever is well-disposed to this city, dead and alive, equally will be honored by me at any rate.210

**Coryphaeus**

These are what please you, son of Menoeceus, Creon, about the one hostile and the one friendly to this city. To use every law, I suppose, is within your power regarding the dead and us who are living.

**Creon**

Take care that you be watchers of my orders.215

**Coryphaeus**

Set forth this task for a younger man to undertake.

**Creon**

No, men to watch over the corpse are ready.48

**Coryphaeus**

Then, what other things would you enjoin upon me?

**Creon**

Do not yield to those disobeying these things.

**Coryphaeus**

There is no one so foolish that he lusts to die.220

**Creon**

That is truly the wage. But profit with its hopes often destroys men.
[A man enters by the ramp from the country. Since Sophocles had only three actors at his disposal, the actor playing his role must be the same as the one who plays Ismene. He cannot be the actor who plays Creon or Antigone, since he appears on stage with them.]

**Watchman**

Lord, I cannot say that I arrive breathless from quickly lifting nimble feet. In fact, I stopped many times to think, whirling around on the roads to turn back. My spirit kept talking to me and saying: "Poor fool, why are you going to a place where you will pay the penalty when you arrive? Wretch, are you dawdling along again? If Creon learns about this from someone else, how then will you not feel pain?" As I rolled around such thoughts, I was gradually and slowly completing the journey, and so a short road became a long one. At last, coming here to you won out. Even if I am saying nothing, I will say this anyway. I come here, clinging to the hope that I will suffer nothing except what is fated.

**Creon**

What has robbed you of your spirit?

**Watchman**

First, I want to tell you this about me. I did not do the deed, and I do not know who was the doer, and it would not be right for me to get into any evil.

**Creon**

You position yourself well in the ranks, drawing up fences around yourself against what is coming. Clearly you are going to mark something new and unheard of.

**Watchman**

Yes, terrible things impose much hesitation.

**Creon**

Will you say it, and then be off with you?

**Watchman**
Well, then, I'm telling you. The corpse--someone has performed funeral rites for it and is gone, having scattered thirsty dust upon its flesh and completed the necessary purifications.

**Creon**

What are you saying? What man was it who dared this?

**Watchman**

I do not know, since there was no blow from a pickaxe, no dirt was dug up by a hoe. The ground was hard and dry, undisturbed and unscored by wagon wheels. The doer left no marks. When the first watchman of the day showed us, a wonder hard to grasp came over all of us. You see, he had disappeared. He was not covered with a tomb, but a light dust was upon him as if from someone avoiding pollution. No marks appeared of a beast or dog that had come and torn him. Bad words started howling at one another as guard reproached guard, and it would have ended in blows. No one was there to stop it. Each man was the one who did the deed, and none beyond doubt, and each was pleading, "I do not know." We were even prepared to take up hot ingots in our hands and walk through fire and swear an oath by the gods that we did not do the deed, or share in knowledge of it with the man who planned and accomplished it. At last, when nothing was left for us to look for, someone spoke out, and he turned every head to the ground in fear, for we could not answer him or see how, in doing so, we could prosper. His word was that this deed had to be reported to you and must not be hidden. This plan prevailed, and the lot condemned me, unlucky me, to take this good thing to you. I do not want to be here. Those here do not want me, I know. Nobody loves the messenger of bad news.

**Coryphaeus**

Lord, deep and anxious thoughts have long been counseling, might not this deed be one driven by the gods.

**Creon**

Stop, before your words fill me with rage, so you will not be discovered both senseless and old.
You are saying what is intolerable when you say
divinities have forethought for this corpse.
While they were hiding him, were they honoring him
as a benefactor, someone who came to fire their temples
ringed with columns and offerings and
to scatter their land and laws hither and yon?
Or, do you see gods honoring evil men?
It cannot be. No, from the first men of the city,
bearing these things with difficulty, have been howling at me
in secret, shaking their heads and not keeping their necks
rightly beneath the yoke so as to love and submit to me.
Because of those men, I know well these men have done
these things under the seduction of bribes.
No base custom ever grew among men like silver.
It sacks cities and uproots men from their homes.
It teaches and perverts the useful minds of men
so that they take up disgraceful endeavors.
It showed men how to practice wickedness
and to know impiety in every deed.
Men who execute these actions in the pay of another,
sooner or later bring about their own punishment.

[To the Watchman.]

But, if Zeus yet enjoys respect from me,
know this well--I am speaking now on my oath--
unless all of you find the perpetrator of this rite
and produce him before my eyes,
Hades alone will not be enough for you until,
hung up alive, you reveal this outrage.
This way you can go on stealing in the future
with the knowledge of where profits must be made,
having learned that you must not be philos to profits from everywhere.
From disgraceful gains, more men
you could see ruined than rescued.

Watchman

Will you allow me to speak, or do I just turn around and go?

Creon

Do you not know, even now, how annoying you sound?

Watchman

Are you stung in your ears or to your very essence?

Creon
Why do you score where I hurt?

**Watchman**

The doer offends your mind, but I your ears.

**Creon**

My, but you are a babbler.320

**Watchman**

That may be so, but not the one who did this deed.

**Creon**

That too, while also forfeiting your very essence for silver.

**Watchman**

Pah!
It is terrible for one who supposes to suppose falsely.

**Creon**

Go ahead, play around with suppositions, but if you do not show me what men did this, you are going to admit325 that terrible are those profits that bring pain.

[Watchman is exiting to the country.]

**Watchman**

I really hope they find him, but whether he is caught or not (luck will decide), there is no way you will see me come back here.\(^{(57)}\) Now, saved beyond hope and judgment,330 I owe the gods a big debt of gratitude.  

**NEXT SCENE**

**Chorus of Theban Elders**

Many things cause terror and wonder, yet nothing is more terrifying and wonderful than man. 
This thing goes across the gray sea on the blasts of winter335 storms, passing beneath waters towering 'round him. The Earth, eldest of the gods,
unwithering and untiring, this thing wears down
as his plows go back and forth year after year
furrow her with the issue of horses.\(^{(58)}\)

This thing ensnares and carries off
the tribe of light-minded birds,
the companies of wild beasts, and
the sea's marine life
with coils of woven meshes--
this keenly skilled man. He has power
through his ways over the beast who traverses
the mountains and haunts the open sky.\(^{(59)}\)
The shaggy-maned horse he tames with yoke,
and the untiring mountain bull.

Both language and thought swift as wind
and impulses that govern cities,
he has taught himself, as well as how
to escape the shafts of rain
while encamped beneath open skies.
All resourceful, he approaches no future thing
to come without resource. From Hades alone
he will not contrive escape.
Refuge from baffling diseases
he has devised.

Possessing a means of invention, a skillfulness beyond expectation, now
now toward evil he moves, now toward good.
By integrating the laws of the earth
and justice under oath sworn to the gods,
he is lofty of city. Citiless is the man with whom ignobility
because of his daring dwells.
May he never reside at my hearth
or think like me,
whoever does such things.\(^{375}\)