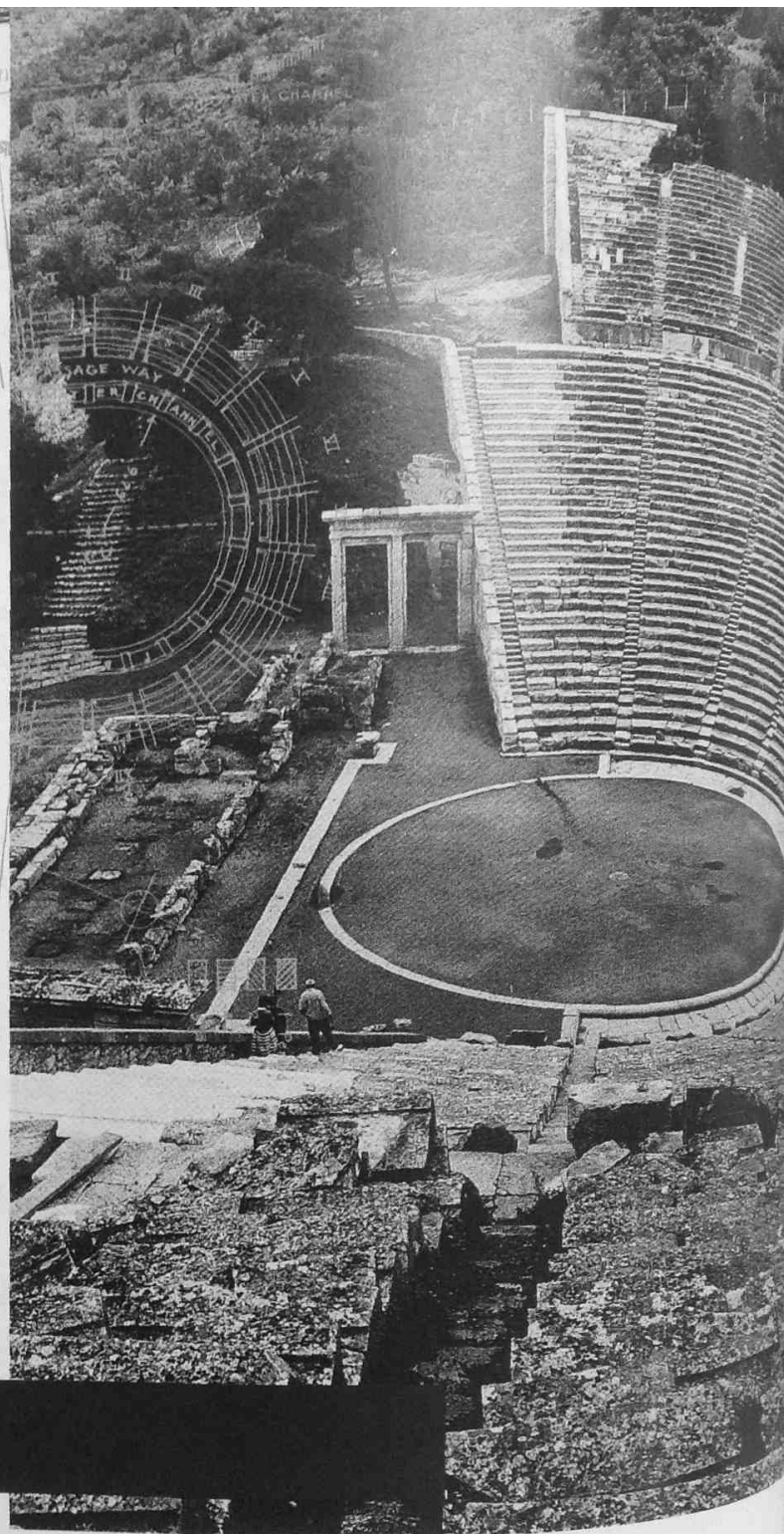


Theater at Epidauros, Greece. The circular floor is the orchestra. Copyright © Frederick Ayer / Photo Researchers, Inc.



## SCENE 2

*(Reenter Sentry leading Antigone.)*

**Choragus.** What does this mean? Surely this captive woman  
Is the princess, Antigone. Why should she be taken?

**Sentry.** Here is the one who did it! We caught her  
In the very act of burying him. Where is Creon?

5 **Choragus.** Just coming from the house.

*(Enter Creon, center.)*

**Creon.**

Why have you come back so soon?

What has happened?

Sentry (*expansively*).

O King,

A man should never be too sure of anything;

I would have sworn

That you'd not see me here again: your anger

Frightened me so, and the things you threatened me with;

But how could I tell then

That I'd be able to solve the case so soon?

No dice throwing this time: I was only too glad to come!

Here is this woman. She is the guilty one:

We found her trying to bury him.

Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will.

I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

Creon. But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

Sentry. She was burying him, I tell you!

Creon (*severely*).

Is this the truth?

Sentry. I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

Creon. The details: come, tell me quickly!

Sentry.

It was like this:

After those terrible threats of yours, King,

We went back and brushed the dust away from the body.

The flesh was soft by now, and stinking,

So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard.

No napping this time! We kept each other awake.

But nothing happened until the white round sun

Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:

Then, suddenly,

A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky

Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees

In the stinging dark. We closed our eyes and endured it.

The whirlwind lasted a long time, but it passed;

And then we looked, and there was Antigone!

I have seen

A mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard

Her crying bitterly a broken note or two

For the young ones stolen. Just so, when this girl

Found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted,

She wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands

That had done this thing.

And then she brought more dust

And sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost.

We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid,

7-13 Note the change in attitude on the part of the sentry. How might his statement "A man should never be too sure of anything" apply to Creon?

35-45 How does the sentry's speech create sympathy for Antigone?

Not even when we charged her with what she had done.  
She denied nothing.

And this was a comfort to me,  
And some uneasiness: for it is a good thing  
To escape from death, but it is no great pleasure  
To bring death to a friend.

Yet I always say  
There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!

Creon (*slowly, dangerously*). And you, Antigone,  
You with your head hanging—do you confess this thing?

Antigone. I do. I deny nothing.

Creon (*to Sentry*). You may go.

(*Exit Sentry.*)

(*to Antigone*) Tell me, tell me briefly:  
Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

Antigone. It was public. Could I help hearing it?

Creon. And yet you dared defy the law.

Antigone. I dared.

It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice  
That rules the world below makes no such laws.

Your edict, King, was strong,  
But all your strength is weakness itself against  
The immortal unrecorded laws of God.  
They are not merely now: they were, and shall be,  
Operative forever, beyond man utterly.

I knew I must die, even without your decree:  
I am only mortal. And if I must die  
Now, before it is my time to die,  
Surely this is no hardship: can anyone  
Living, as I live, with evil all about me,  
Think Death less than a friend? This death of mine  
Is of no importance; but if I had left my brother  
Lying in death unburied, I should have suffered.  
Now I do not.

57-63 What law does Antigone recognize as the supreme one?

64-70 What is Antigone's attitude toward death?

film still from the 1960 movie  
Antigone. Antigone is about to  
be taken prisoner after sprinkling  
oil and wine over her brother's  
corpse. Culver Pictures.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**edict** (ē'dĭkt') *n.* an order put out by a person in authority

You smile at me. Ah Creon,  
Think me a fool, if you like; but it may well be  
That a fool convicts me of folly.

75 **Choragus.** Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to  
reason!  
She has never learned to yield.

**Creon.** She has much to learn.  
The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron  
Cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their necks  
At the pull of the smallest curb.

Pride? In a slave?

80 This girl is guilty of a double insolence,  
Breaking the given laws and boasting of it.  
Who is the man here,  
She or I, if this crime goes unpunished?  
Sister's child, or more than sister's child,  
85 Or closer yet in blood—she and her sister  
Win bitter death for this!

(to servants) Go, some of you,  
Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.  
Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the house there.  
Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark  
90 Cry for light, and the guardian brain shudders;  
But how much worse than this  
Is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

**Antigone.** Creon, what more do you want than my death?

**Creon.** Nothing.  
That gives me everything.

**Antigone.** Then I beg you: kill me.  
95 This talking is a great weariness: your words  
Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine  
Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so:  
I should have praise and honor for what I have done.  
All these men here would praise me  
100 Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you.  
(bitterly) Ah the good fortune of kings,  
Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

**Creon.** You are alone here in that opinion.

**Antigone.** No, they are with me. But they keep their tongues in leash.

105 **Creon.** Maybe. But you are guilty, and they are not.

**Antigone.** There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

82–83 Think about how Creon's perception of Antigone as a threat to his manhood heightens the conflict.

99–104 What does Antigone assume about the attitude of the chorus? Do you think she is right?

Creon. But Eteocles—was he not your brother too?

Antigone. My brother too.

Creon. And you insult his memory?

Antigone (*softly*). The dead man would not say that I insult it.

110 Creon. He would: for you honor a traitor as much as him.

Antigone. His own brother, traitor or not, and equal in blood.

Creon. He made war on his country. Eteocles defended it.

Antigone. Nevertheless, there are honors due all the dead.

Creon. But not the same for the wicked as for the just.

115 Antigone. Ah Creon, Creon,

Which of us can say what the gods hold wicked?

Creon. An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

Antigone. It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

Creon (*finally losing patience*). Go join them, then; if you must have  
your love,

120 Find it in hell!

Choragus. But see, Ismene comes:

(*Enter Ismene, guarded.*)

Those tears are sisterly; the cloud

That shadows her eyes rains down gentle sorrow.

Creon. You too, Ismene,

125 Snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood  
Stealthily—and all the time I never knew  
That these two sisters were aiming at my throne!

Ismene,

Do you confess your share in this crime or deny it?  
Answer me.

130 Ismene. Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty.

Antigone (*coldly*). No, Ismene. You have no right to say so.  
You would not help me, and I will not have you help me.

Ismene. But now I know what you meant; and I am here  
To join you, to take my share of punishment.

135 Antigone. The dead man and the gods who rule the dead  
Know whose act this was. Words are not friends.

Ismene. Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die with you:  
I too have a duty that I must discharge to the dead.

Antigone. You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

140 Ismene. What do I care for life when you are dead?

Antigone. Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his opinions.

115–116 Unlike Creon, Antigone holds that humans cannot understand the thinking of the gods.

131–143 What do you think of Antigone's treatment of her sister?

Ismene. You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

Antigone. It's a joyless laughter, Ismene.

Ismene.

But can I do nothing?

Antigone. Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you.

There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too.

Ismene. But we are equally guilty!

Antigone.

No, more, Ismene.

You are alive, but I belong to Death.

Creon (to the Chorus). Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls:

One has just now lost her mind; the other,

It seems, has never had a mind at all.

Ismene. Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, King.

Creon. Yours certainly did, when you assumed guilt with the guilty!

Ismene. But how could I go on living without her?

Creon.

You are.

She is already dead.

Ismene.

But your own son's bride!

Creon. There are places enough for him to push his plow.

I want no wicked women for my sons!

Ismene. O dearest Haemon, how your father wrongs you!

Creon. I've had enough of your childish talk of marriage!

Choragus. Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son?

Creon. No; Death will do that for me.

Choragus.

Then she must die?

Creon. You dazzle me.

—But enough of this talk!

(to guards) You, there, take them away and guard them well:

For they are but women, and even brave men run

When they see Death coming.

(Exeunt Ismene, Antigone, and guards.)

## ODE 2

Chorus. Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance!

Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken

Forever: damnation rises behind each child

Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,

When the long darkness under sea roars up

And bursts drumming death upon the wind-whipped sand.

154 Ismene's line reveals a complication in the plot: Creon's son, Haemon, is engaged to Antigone. Creon's love for his immediate family is now an issue in his conflict with Antigone.

155-156 How does Creon feel about the bond between Haemon and Antigone?

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past  
 Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation from generation  
 Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.  
 10 So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line  
 Drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word  
 And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty.

What mortal arrogance  
 Transcends the wrath of Zeus?  
 15 Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long months  
 Of the timeless gods: but he is young forever,  
 And his house is the shining day of high Olympus.  
 All that is and shall be,  
 And all the past, is his.  
 20 No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

17 **Olympus:** a mountain in northern Greece, home of the gods and goddesses.

The straying dreams of men  
 May bring them ghosts of joy:  
 But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;  
 Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.  
 25 But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:  
*Fate works most for woe*  
*With Folly's fairest show.*  
 Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.

28 Do you think this line could apply to Creon?

WORDS  
 TO  
 KNOW

**compulsive** (kəm-pŭl'sĭv) *adj.* having the ability to compel or force