

MIRO GAVRAN

CREON ' S ANTIGONE

The play opened on December 22, 1983 at the Gavella Drama Theatre in Zagreb with the following cast:

CREON Drago Mestrovic

ANTIGONE Anja Sovagovic

No. of Acts: 2

Setting: A dungeon

Time: The distant past

Director: Damir Madarić

I wish to thank Sophocles, Anouilh and Smole for their kind co-operation.

M.G.

A DUNGEON

ANTIGONE: I am Antigone. Only until yesterday I was happy and enjoyed a carefree existence, dancing, riding, swimming... My Uncle Creon is sovereign of this land. I cannot fathom why he has had me imprisoned. It makes no sense. His devoted general has told me that I will be killed in two week's time - and I don't know why. I have done nothing. There was no trial, no reason I can see. It's all so strange, bizarre, incomprehensible. - One minute you are sitting in your cosy room, looking out your window at the bustle in the streets, thinking about the ball tomorrow, chatting to your servants about the most ordinary sort of things, you feel so wonderful in the rocking chair by the stove, and just when you are thinking how really marvellous this world is, someone pounds loudly on your door, the secret police come rushing into your chambers, they arrest you and tell you you'll die in two weeks' time - everything comes tumbling down, none of it makes sense. Something huge, invisible is against you - you're helpless. You'd love to shed your own skin but you've nowhere to go. You'd like to trade places with ordinary mortals, but no-one's interested. Your throat becomes dry, you feel defenceless. You strain every ounce of your brain power to find a way out of the nightmare but no way out can be found. You grab for the proverbial straw that all drowning people reach for but there aren't any left. So many drowning people have flailed in the Greek sea that all the straws are gone. You begin to wish you'd never been born - so that now you wouldn't have to die, you curse your parents and their thoughtless love, your curse your fate and the invisible culprit. You wish it were all nothing but a bad dream, you try to wake up. - In vain. Helpless, defenceless, bitter and helpless. You are stunned by the feeling of vulnerability and you succumb to it. Why did Uncle Creon have me locked away? Why do I have to die? Why am I in prison? Why? Why? Why? Oh Lord, help me, do not forsake me, forgive my reluctance to pray, forgive me all the sins of my life and free me, Lord. I implore you, Lord, please free me from this evil, please, please oh Lord.

(Creon enters, carrying two scripts under his arm.)

CREON: You were praying?

ANTIGONE: *(She does not reply.)*

CREON: There is no God. There are only kings and those who cannot be kings. God was invented by you - people who cannot be kings.

ANTIGONE: Why have you thrown me into prison? Why are you having me killed? Why should I die? I have done nothing. Why should you kill me?

CREON: Why? Why? - questions are all I hear. Slow down, you'll learn. Every 'why' has its 'because' and the greatest 'whys' have the greatest 'because's'. No-one dies by chance.

ANTIGONE: But I have done nothing.

CREON: You will. You've got time.

ANTIGONE: But how? - How could you know who is planning evil deeds!

CREON: We kings see the future because we tailor it.

ANTIGONE: But I have harboured no evil intent, and never will. I honour authority and the earthly laws, I obey the law, I do nothing to disturb the state, I do nothing to disturb kings, I do not rock the order of things, so how could I be bothering you? Leave me be. I've left you alone - now you leave me alone. How can you punish me when I've done nothing wrong and I never will?

CREON: You're still young and it's not easy for you to understand certain things.

ANTIGONE: I understand nothing.

CREON: You will. Take your time, you still have some. Not much, perhaps, but sufficient.

(Silence)

CREON: I have always enjoyed talking with the people I've condemned to die - they reek of extreme fear and understand nothing.

ANTIGONE: Neither do I.

CREON: I know. Take your time, you've nearly reached your end.

ANTIGONE: But I've done nothing wrong. Why should I die?

CREON: There's that question again. You are really quite relentless. You tax me, and I'm already so tired. I, the king of the land, am tired - but I have come to chat with you, to unburden my heart, perhaps to feel a little better. I have no need to feign might and aplomb before you since you are nearly dead and one only needs to show authority over the living. I thought that you at least would have a little understanding for my problems.

ANTIGONE: Do you truly intend to kill me?

CREON: That has already been decided. Why do I have to keep on confirming your sentence.

ANTIGONE: Wherefore a sentence with no trial?

CREON: Picky, picky. The formalities will easily be arranged. You have two weeks to look forward to. That's something.

(Silence.)

CREON: The King's lot is a hard one, believe me. Since the day I was crowned, I haven't slept through one single night. I lie there in bed and pretend to sleep. The King is resting, and in the morning I stretch myself and pretend satisfaction, while I leave behind me a night of torment when I flinch at every creaking sound as if it heralds rebellion. I trust no-one, I love no-one, I am worn out and my affairs of state pile up inexorably; if you don't solve a problem today - three are born of it tomorrow. I have no respite, no holidays, no hunting, no right to illness - everybody is waiting for me to falter, to make a false move, everyone craves my sceptre. I work twenty-four hours a day while the malicious gossips accuse me of spending lavishing on hunting, horse and whores.

ANTIGONE: I have always respected you, oh King, Uncle Creon.

CREON: We always respect those we fear.

ANTIGONE: I respected you long before you became king., I respected you while my father still ruled.

CREON: You are making me laugh - even I despised myself then. I was the court fawner, feigning innocence and obedience. Even the jester would kick me in the rump and I could not respond in kind, for your father loved his jester more than he loved me. But patience has brought it rewards. My five minutes have finally come and I'll do everything in my power to turn these five minutes into fifty years.

ANTIGONE: I couldn't care less whether you rule for five years or five centuries. I couldn't care less who reigns. Save my life. I am harmless. All I care for is fun, riding, swimming. I am harmless.

CREON: No-one is harmless. At one time of our lives all of us take our pleasure in riding, gambling, whoring, and then someone rubs us the wrong way, insults us, ridicules us, so we rage but can do nothing when our foe is the stronger. With a smile, we swallow our pain and realise that the world is divided into kings and those who cannot be king - we long to be king, and from that day forth, riding no longer holds any charms.

ANTIGONE: I want to live, I want to live.

CREON: I know that my subjects hate me . and I am glad they do. If people are to be thinking of you every minute, if you are to mean something in their lives, they must either love you or hate you, and love is so fickle. I prefer hatred.

ANTIGONE: I don't hate you.

CREON: My son Hemon, your fiancé, is waiting impatiently for my demise. I expect his patience will crumble sooner or later, and he will try to speed along the course of nature.

ANTIGONE: Hemon loves you.

CREON: No-one loves a king, least of all his son. He has no idea how I feel his each and every glance on my countenance, glances that seek for the first signs of age and weakness. My son is my greatest foe. Ever since I became king I have been alone, even without a spouse. I haven't slept with my wife since I became king. I fear, no, I know she desires my death, she wants the crown.

ANTIGONE: You're imagining things.

CREON: No, I am not. I know. Once when I was presiding over a land dispute, she said, 'If I were King, I would have decided differently' - and I have not forgotten that.

ANTIGONE: Meaningless.

CREON: It means a great deal to me. And your brothers Eteocles and Polynices want my death, too. They sense their right to the throne - in a month's time Eteocles will come of age, he'll seek the crown and I won't relinquish it. Some things have to be stolen away, not given.

ANTIGONE: You are ill, Uncle. You see enemies at every turn.

CREON: I see enemies in both your sister Ismene and in you - you will marry my son and be painfully conscious of the fact that the moment I die, my son become King, and you Queen - and you'll long for my death.

ANTIGONE: I will not - if only you save my life.

CREON: Relinquish all hope - your fate is sealed.

ANTIGONE: Have you no mercy?

CREON: None. Kings dare not be merciful. Mercy is unnatural, mercy comes only from the gods.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: My brothers will free me.

CREON: An hour ago they announced to me that you would free them.

ANTIGONE: ... So they, too...

CREON: Yes, they, too, are in prison, and await their deaths. I have decided to destroy all my foes.

ANTIGONE: You will never succeed. The people will rise up in rebellion when they see their king has transformed into a butcher.

CREON: The people are dolts. They will think what I want them to think. The people need my proclamations and heed my priests.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: And my sister?

CREON: Her I plan to save. - It is bad enough for a king to have countless heirs to the throne, but even worse when he has none at all. It is best to have only one - a harmless and foolish one. So I will slay all of you, except Ismene.

ANTIGONE: Slay Ismene and save me - the two of us are twins, identical in every way, no-one can tell us apart.

CREON: Twins yes, identical no.

ANTIGONE: Oh yes we are. We are like two peas in a pod. What I know, she knows. We've been together always. Murder her and save me.

CREON: Antigone, it is done. You will die. Ismene will live.

ANTIGONE: But why me? The two of us are the same. People often confuse us.

Creon: No, you are not the same.

ANTIGONE: How do we differ?

CREON: Have you ever heard me address you with Ismene's name, or Ismene with yours?

ANTIGONE: No, you never have. You truly are the only one who has ever been able to tell us apart. I always found it odd.

CREON: There's nothing odd about it. I found it easy to tell you apart for the two of you are so different. Human fear has a certain odour, and I am one of the few who has a nose for human fear. All people spread fear's odour, but not with equal intensity. You have less of an odour of fear than Ismene does, so I could always tell you apart. You are the more dangerous one, so I'll kill you and save Ismene.

ANTIGONE: You are wrong.

CREON: A king is never wrong - of all of you, Ismene fears me the most. Ismene is the least dangerous and the most stupid. Antigone, speak no longer of life, you are already dead.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: Since all is done, since it all must be as you say, why talk with me? What can you want of me?

CREON: I wish to discuss your death.

ANTIGONE: What is there to discuss?

CREON: All deaths are not the same. How a person dies matters. There are deaths, and deaths, you know..

ANTIGONE: You intend to torture me?

CREON: No, I don't... if you consent to co-operate. It is not merely a question of the way you die, but how I intend to represent it.

ANTIGONE: I don't understand - what sort of representation do you have in mind?

CREON: You are not a slave, and you are no ordinary citizen. You are from the royal family and the story - the legend - about the way you die, will long outlive you.

ANTIGONE: I am absolutely indifferent to what people will say of me when I'm gone.

CREON: No-one is indifferent to that.

ANTIGONE: I am.

CREON: No, you are not. You are lying. Think and you will see that you're wrong... Antigone, you know you must die, so what can you obtain from your dying, from your death? I have quite a lot to offer.

ANTIGONE: I don't understand what you are talking about.

CREON: Be patient, I'll explain. But listen carefully and please, do not interrupt. I must kill you, your brothers, my wife and my son. That makes five bodies. An awkwardly large number for a royal family. If I murder you all without any official explanation, without a trial - the people will consider me a cruel leader and they will soon rise up in rebellion. On the other hand, if I rig up a perfect trial, or if five members of the royal family 'die' in the most perfect way possible - with the King blameless - that, too, would be bad, because the King's complete innocence in the matter would be doubted. The people know that a king can never be completely innocent, no matter what happens in the state. So you see, it is necessary to avoid both these extremes. That is why I have planned a play of sorts in which we members of the royal family will play our roles. In this play, I have designated for you the most sublime, the most noble of roles in the history of human society and theatre, while I have left myself the role of the blind, stubborn villain who, in the end, will suffer from your death. The play is written in such a way that I, who in reality want your death, will perceive it in the play as a grievous tragedy. I am stricken; I mourn you. Listen. This is what happens: Eteocles and Polynices are being held as you are, in

secret, while I spread rumours around town that Polynices has gone to Argosy to muster up an army against us. I have also spread the word that Eteocles is participating at present in military exercises, in readiness for defence of the city. Within one week the city will be attacked by a band of mercenaries, and everyone will assume that these are Polynices's soldiers. During the siege, my secret police will murder Eteocles and Polynices and toss their still warm bodies into the fracas. The mercenary bands will retreat, the bodies of Eteocles and Polynices will remain on the battlefield, side by side, and everyone will easily believe the tale that they slew each other in a duel. Eteocles, the defender of the city, will be buried with the highest of state honours followed by four days of national mourning, while Polynices's body will be left unburied on the battlefield, and I will forbid his burial - under the threat of death. This is where you come in. You will come to perform the rite that the gods require out of sisterly love and you will bury your brother symbolically, and then one of my spies, dressed as a sentry, will arrest you and bring you to me, and then you will defy me before my courtiers and speak of how divine laws overrule secular laws, and how you do not repent defiance of my command and how you go to your death proudly, without fear. I order that they bury you alive in your grave. They take you to the grave. I suddenly have a change of heart and decide to save you, but it is too late, for meanwhile you commit suicide. My police will give you a painless poison. And because of your suicide, my horrid son, your fiancé, takes his own life for the sake of his beloved i.e. you. As soon as he 'dies', my wicked wife 'kills herself', inconsolable at the loss of her son, and in the end I curse my fate and weep for all of you. (*He chuckles.*) Isn't it perfect? I get rid of my five most dangerous enemies, and in the eyes of the people I am only slightly at fault, and terribly unhappy.

ANTIGONE: Do you really think that you will deceive the entire country?

CREON: Of course I will - I am a genius.

ANTIGONE: You must have been working on this 'play' of yours for quite some time.

CREON: Not as long as you might think - it all went quite quickly once the inspiration struck.

ANTIGONE: If only it hadn't.

CREON: Why? You are the one who gains most from the story - you become a hero, you defy the king and go willingly to your death, moved by a higher purpose.

ANTIGONE: Poppycock.

CREON: It is not poppycock. You have to die, no matter what, so isn't it better to go as a demi-god than as an ordinary mortal?

ANTIGONE: I prefer Ismene's role.

CREON: So do I - I don't like mine much, either, but one can't have one's cake and eat it, too. This is the script of my little play, or game, call it what you will. One copy for you, one for me.

(*He hands Antigone her copy; she takes it.*)

ANTIGONE: If I have followed you correctly, certain aspects of this farce seem rather foolish, even naive.

CREON: Which ones?

ANTIGONE: Well, the part about burying the brother, for instance. No-one will believe that. Why should I go to bury my insurgent brother? Why should I defy you when my life depends upon your will?

CREON: You are a hero, and your thoughts are dictated by logic of a higher order. You are led by more elevated, more noble motives.

ANTIGONE: Yes, but I am an ordinary girl who has only begun to live. Why should give up my life for a principle?

CREON: You are hardly an ordinary girl - you are above all people, others will admire you, legends of your life will spread, plays will be written, you will become a model for others, and one day when people pronounce the name 'Antigone' they will be saying a great deal more than a mere name.

(A brief silence.)

CREON: Do you consent to play the role?

ANTIGONE: What if I refuse?

CREON: If you refuse you will die at once, in agony - not as a hero and not with painless poison, while if you consent you will have two more weeks of life, two weeks to practise your part.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: Alright.

CREON: Then turn to page twenty. I would like to rehearse one of the most important scenes at once.

ANTIGONE: *(Turns to page twenty.)*

CREON: Third line from the bottom, from *Will you do more...*

ANTIGONE: Yes, I see.

CREON: Let's try it. Read.

ANTIGONE *(Reading.)*: *Will you do more than kill me?*

CREON *(Reading.)*: *No, nothing more; that is all I could wish.*

ANTIGONE *(Reading.)*: *Why then...*

CREON: Wait, wait. You can't talk like that. You can't just say *Why then the delay* - your tone is far too gentle. Don't you see? You are defying me, you do not fear me, you do not fear death, you understand that you're going all the way. You despise me; you are far above me, I am lowly scum while you are a hero. Let's start from the beginning - and don't forget who you are.

ANTIGONE *(Reading.)*: *Why then delay? There is nothing that you can say*

That I would wish to hear, as nothing I say

Can weigh with you. I have given my brother burial.

What greater honour could I wish? All these

Would say that what I did was honourable,

But fear locks up their lips. To speak and act

Just as he likes is a king's prerogative.

CREON *(Reading.)*: *You are wrong. None of my subjects thinks as you do.*

ANTIGONE *(Reading.)*: *Yes, Sire, they do; but dare not tell you so.*

CREON (*Reading.*): *And you are not only alone, but unashamed.*

ANTIGONE (*Reading.*): *There is no shame in honouring my brother.*

CREON: Not bad, that'll do. I know you can't do the job perfectly at the first try. You must become one with the role, you must find the substance within you for building this character.

ANTIGONE: It all seems so stupid.

CREON: When you read the script from the beginning to end you'll change your mind. From what I've told you, you can't possibly sense all the artistic impact and veracity that the characters possess. As soon as you've read it through you'll see. And don't forget that the defiance you show Creon, or rather, me, is not defiance against one man, but against authority. It is a political act.

ANTIGONE: Politics don't interest me.

CREON: But power does - all people crave power. Only politics can bring us power.

ANTIGONE: Politics disgust me.

CREON: Forget your feelings now, concentrate on the role, on the Antigone in my play. Most important of all is to speak with conviction. You may be young but your view of life is built on solid foundations, you are the embodiment of the divine laws and for them you are prepared to do anything.

ANTIGONE: I fear it may be unconvincing.

CREON: Make it convincing.

ANTIGONE: How?

CREON: By acting with your heart. Act the hero and you'll be a hero.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: You ask too much of me.

CREON: But I am giving you so much.

ANTIGONE: Death is all you give me.

CREON: Death was dealt you by fate the moment you were born into the royal family, but I am giving you glory, nobility, immortality. *(Laughing.)* In the poetic sense, of course. No-one in this world has been given more.

ANTIGONE: You speak as if you relish the prospect of murdering us all.

CREON: There you are wrong - I take no pleasure in this bloodshed. I have no thirst for blood and I do not enjoy the incarceration and the killing. But if I were to confide in you that it horrifies me, you would never believe me, for you have heard the tremor of joy in my voice. And, I am indeed glad. Glad to be chasing death away from myself in the cleverest way possible, by killing others. I am glad to be rid of my enemies and to enjoy some respite, at least for a while. I feel a certain glee at my sly plan. In the world around me, everything is going smoothly according to my plan, to my design, to my orders - and that is what I have longed for my entire life: not to be an object that others toy with but to be the god who toys with others.

ANTIGONE: You are far too proud of yourself. And vain.

CREON I am merely a king. A king who exults in life and being king. A king whose life and reign have merged into one and who can no longer relinquish his sovereignty without relinquishing his life. From the day I placed the crown on my head until my death, I am nothing but a tight-rope walker whom everyone watches and whose fall everyone desires.

ANTIGONE: You speak well of life and of death. You find it easy to cloak your crimes in words. But the fact that you will murder us is a crime, as humiliating for a king as for a slave.

CREON: A crime?... A crime... crime - I have forgotten the meaning of the word, just a moment while I recall... ah yes: a crime is every conscious or unconscious attack on authority, or any attempt or the very thought that hides such an intent.

ANTIGONE: One cannot talk with you as with other people.

CREON: Of course not - I am different from other people: I do not live as they do, I do not dream as they do, I do not think as they do, I do not enjoy the things that delight them, and I know more.

(Silence.)

CREON: Good. We've agreed then - in two weeks time we perform. You have the play. Read it and learn your lines by heart. I will be back within a week and we'll rehearse.

ANTIGONE: A whole week?

CREON: Yes, a week from now - then we'll practise our scene. All that matters now is that you learn the lines by heart. I will practice my lines. My faithful guards will treat you well. We'll see each other in seven day's time.

(Creon leaves.)

(Antigone is left alone - she takes up the script, opens the first page and begins to read to herself. The stage grows dark.)

BETWEEN THE ACTS

While the stage is dark between Act I and Act II, loud music can be heard. The music dies down for a moment and then Antigone's voice comes over the loud-speakers, with these sentences:

I will bury my brother; and if I should die for it, what happiness! ... I admit it. I do not deny it... (Echo.): I admit it. I do not deny it... Convicted of reverence - I shall be content... I knew that I would have to die, of course, on your order or without it... If it be soon, so much the better... My way is to share my love... Why delay then?... This punishment will not bear any pain... There is no punishment that can rob me of my honourable death. (Echo.): ... of my honourable death.

THE SAME DUNGEON

(Antigone is sitting quietly and staring before her. The 'script' is beside her. She picks it up, leafs through it, dwells on one page, puts the text down, stand up and starts acting her role. Her voice is calm, neither too strong nor too loud. From her every word, her every gesture from now to the end, there emanates an air of peace, strength and decisiveness.)

ANTIGONE: *So to my grave, my bridal bower, my everlasting prison, I go, to join my many kinsmen who dwell in the mansions of Persephone, last and unhappiest, before my time. Yet I believe my father will be there to welcome me, and my mother to greet me gladly.*

(CREON enters.)

CREON: Rehearsing?

ANTIGONE: I know it by heart.

CREON: Well, I hope so.

ANTIGONE: Too well, I fear.

CREON: We will see.

ANTIGONE: Yes, we will see.

(Silence.)

CREON: A week has passed.

ANTIGONE: So it has.

CREON: You have only one week left.

ANTIGONE: Maybe not.

CREON: Why?

(Silence.)

CREON: Do you care what it is like out there?

ANTIGONE: No, I don't.

CREON: Well, I'll tell you anyway: it's sunny. My people are preparing for the trumped-up war with Polynices's army. The courtiers haven't even noticed your absence because they think that you are your sister Ismene.

ANTIGONE: We were similar, nearly identical.

CREON: Why were?

ANTIGONE: We are no longer.

CREON: What makes you say that?

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: I admire your play. It is marvellous. I cannot imagine how an animal like you could write such a masterpiece of art.

CREON: The text is entirely utilitarian, there is no art to it at all.

ANTIGONE: No, this is no ordinary text. This is a true drama, better than any I know. My part is wonderful, and even the others are not poorly written.

CREON: Do you know it by heart?

ANTIGONE: By heart and more. I have hardly slept a wink these last seven nights, mulling constantly over the script. There is something magic in it, something sublime. You should have been a writer, not a politician.

CREON: All the writers of my land wish they were in my place.

ANTIGONE: I have noticed that you inevitably judge others by yourself, and this leads you to err.

CREON: I have never erred so far.

ANTIGONE: But soon enough you shall.

CREON: In what?

ANTIGONE: You will learn when it is too late.

(Silence. They stare at each other.)

CREON: Nothing can happen in my country without me learning of it before everyone else. My secret police force works with the utmost efficiency.

ANTIGONE: You believe them too implicitly.

CREON: Not at all.

ANTIGONE: Creon, can a flask of poison or something similar be sneaked into this prison?

CREON: By no means.

ANTIGONE: Are you certain? You forget that your prison wardens are men with weaknesses like everybody else.

(Silence. They stare at each other.)

CREON: You wish to tell me something?

ANTIGONE: I have no more wishes.

(Silence.)

CREON: Shall we rehearse?

ANTIGONE: Yes, let's rehearse.

CREON: Pick up your script.

ANTIGONE: I don't need it.

CREON (*glancing at his script*): Page thirty-five, starting with *No funeral hymn...*

ANTIGONE (*interrupting him*): Fine.

(*Silence.*)

ANTIGONE: *No funeral hymn; no marriage-music, no sun from this day forth, no light, no friend to weep at my departing.*

CREON: *Weeping and wailing at the door of death! There'd be no end of it, if it had force to buy off death. Away with her at once, and close her up in her rock-vaulted tomb. Leave her and let her die, if die she must, or live within her dungeon. Though on...*

ANTIGONE: Stop, Uncle. I can see that you are one of those brilliant but stupid artists who does not understand the impact of their own words. Your acting just then was worthless. Weak, shallow, unconvincing.

CREON: Why?

ANTIGONE: You must understand: you are not Creon. You are authority, and authority must have a mightier voice.

CREON: You don't mean I should be screaming, do you?

ANTIGONE: There you go, missing the point again - mighty and loud are not necessarily the same. One can have a mighty whisper. Did you know that?

CREON: Yes.

ANTIGONE: But only a true king can have that.

CREON: What do you mean?

(*Silence.*)

ANTIGONE: And beware, Creon. You mustn't be more pitiful than the script describes.

CREON: I know damn well how I must be.

ANTIGONE: There. You *must*, yet you are the king.

CREON: I *must* of my own free will, no-one has imposed it on me.

ANTIGONE: Why do you insist on something you yourself do not believe? At least you don't have to act with me.

CREON: Every single thing I do, I do according to my own free will.

ANTIGONE: Then you are a god.

(*Silence.*)

ANTIGONE: Tell me... sincerely, please... tell me: are you a happy man?

CREON: What do you mean?

ANTIGONE: Are you or are you not happy? - that's what I mean.

CREON: I hadn't considered that - I haven't time for such nonsense.

ANTIGONE: Happiness is hardly nonsense.

CREON: I am happy, and why wouldn't I be - I am the most powerful person in the entire kingdom, so therefore I must be the happiest as well.

ANTIGONE: You think about the most ordinary things in the stupidest way - your crown has dulled your insight, separating you from people and from life. It is pointless to discuss happiness with you, or love, for instance. Subjects on which one could talk with every beggar in this city, a king has nothing to say. If this is so, and it is, is it not sad to be a king?

CREON: When I look at the people teeming through the streets and squares, when I look at the little children and the feeble old folks, and when I know that they all read their destiny in my will, I feel more powerful and important than anyone else in the whole entire world.

ANTIGONE: Creon, you are lying.

CREON: How could you know that?

ANTIGONE: Because I know that in the thoughts of every old person and every child you sense rebellion and see images of your own demise. And you feel powerless that you can't slay an entire people. In your opinion, those people are bad for they do not think with your head.

CREON: But my people do think with my head. They must, for I forbid all other thoughts.

ANTIGONE: Those are nothing but your warped wishes. A product of the fear of the same people who are three times wiser than you think they are, who feign simplicity before you, because they know that the simple are forgiven everything. You fear your own people. You really do.

CREON: Perhaps, but not as much as they fear me.

ANTIGONE: Oh, I don't know about that - once you yourself said that from the day you placed the crown on your head you hadn't slept a single night. Sleep evades you . while the people you claim quake in fear of you - snore blissfully every night in their little rooms that give them more warmth than the entire kingdom gives to you.

CREON: I cannot agree with you.

ANTIGONE: You no longer agree even with yourself.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: You are ugly, King, you are remarkably ugly. You used to be so handsome. I recall the day when you adorned yourself with the crown - you suddenly grew ugly.

CREON: Change the subject of this conversation.

ANTIGONE: Your face assumed its wrinkles in a single day. Your gestures became clumsy - perhaps because you are so painfully aware of everyone's eyes fixed upon you, you pay too much attention to the way they look at you for you know that they seek signs of royal majesty in your every move - and that is why you have become as ridiculous as an old hen.

CREON: You are worn out, you're exhausted, you are obsessed with death and talking nonsense.

ANTIGONE: Even your voice is ugly now.

CREON: Enough about aesthetics.

ANTIGONE: I am convinced that none of your subjects, despite the best of intentions, could find a single trace of beauty in your face - for beauty without goodness cannot survive.

CREON: Your words are meaningless, my attendants did their job well this morning. I am more than satisfied with my face.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: So you are a happy man. I see. I had fancied happy people rather differently.

CREON: And you? Are you happy?

ANTIGONE: If I were to answer you sincerely, you'd never believe me, and since I'd rather not lie, I will refrain from answering.

CREON: Today you are behaving most oddly, you are full of riddles - the proximity of death seems to be working its spell.

ANTIGONE: The proximity of death - those words have a lovely ring to them.

CREON: I thought you'd say they chill you.

ANTIGONE: It all depends on how you hear them.

CREON: You hear them as a woman condemned.

ANTIGONE: Or so you think

CREON: There you are, mysterious again.

ANTIGONE: And there you are, foolish again - every elusive thought drives you frantic.

CREON: That comes part and parcel with the vocation and no more - you see, we kings hate all that is elusive. The elusive is the germ of dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction is the germ of strength, and in strength lies the germ of rebellion.

ANTIGONE: Nicely put, but wrong - strength is not the germ of rebellion, but rather rebellion is born in the minds of kings.

CREON: Nonsense!

ANTIGONE: Not at all. Whatever one dreams long and often comes true one day, and that applies to the desirable and to the less desirable.

CREON: Have your dreams come true?

ANTIGONE: I dreamt for far too short a time.

CREON: If you were as stupid as your sister, you could dream on much longer - you'd still be alive like her.

ANTIGONE: She no longer lives.

CREON: In what sense?

ANTIGONE: In the true sense.

CREON: While your here in prison are living in the true sense?

ANTIGONE: That's right. Now.

CREON: That's nonsense.

ANTIGONE: To you, everything that is not born of your own mind is nonsense.

CREON: Nonsense is all that is born without royal permission.

ANTIGONE: There must be quite a lot of nonsense in your country, then.

CREON: I wouldn't say so.

ANTIGONE: I have already said it.

(A prolonged silence.)

ANTIGONE: Creon, tell me, how long do you expect to rule?

CREON: For a long time.

ANTIGONE: How long?

CREON: Extremely long.

ANTIGONE: Would you like me to tell you how long?

CREON: How could you possibly know such a thing?

ANTIGONE: One attains clairvoyance when faced with death.

CREON: Your clairvoyance doesn't interest me. I don't believe in it.

ANTIGONE: Would you like me to tell you how long you will rule?

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: Would you like me to tell you?

CREON: How long?

ANTIGONE: Not very long at all.

CREON: Why?

ANTIGONE: Because you anticipate such longevity.

(Silence.)

CREON: What a gorgeous day it is outside. The sun is glistening. The fragrance of the sea wafts in the air.

ANTIGONE: You can't hurt me with those empty poetic phrases.

CREON: I did not mean to.

ANTIGONE: Oh yes you did, but you failed. You can no longer flay me with words. And besides: I know that when the sun does shine, the King is the one it warms least.

CREON: But the King is the one who decides whom it won't warm at all.

ANTIGONE: Poor comfort.

(Silence.)

CREON: Soon I'll be rid of my greatest foes.

ANTIGONE: Now that you have embroiled yourself in this intrigue, it is too late to go back - but you'll soon realise that you were wrong. You knew us - your old foes - inside out, and we could do nothing. In the time it takes you to get to know your new enemies, it may be too late.

CREON: I'll eliminate them too, when the time comes, and the new ones after them, and the yet newer ones - until the day I die a natural death.

ANTIGONE: One day you'll be there either too early or too late, the calculations will go wrong, you'll go too far and then you'll no longer be able to stop yourself. Sooner or later you'll make the wrong move.

CREON: Impossible. I am always extremely cautious.

ANTIGONE: Other kings have been cautious, too, and yet all of them have erred. Even those who hoped to rule to the end. All of you are intoxicated with power, and in your drunkenness, you lose your hold on it.

(Silence.)

CREON: Perhaps we should get on with the rehearsal.

ANTIGONE: Take it slowly, Creon. The rehearsal must flow freely, or the performance will be a disaster.

CREON: It won't be a disaster - it is a good script.

ANTIGONE: Everything depends on the actors.

CREON: On the directing.

CREON: Well yes, on the actors.

(Silence.)

ANTIGONE: Kings must know people well.

CREON: I know people.

ANTIGONE: He who knows people well, knows what happens to someone who is waiting to die.

CREON: Such a person grows increasingly timid. He ceases to retort - fear overwhelms him, the fear of death.

ANTIGONE: What do you think, Creon? What happens when a person reaches the last barrier of fear, and when that person crosses over it?

CREON: A new fear comes to take its place.

ANTIGONE: Wrong, Creon.

(They watch each other in silence.)

ANTIGONE: Turn to page twenty.

(Creon turns to page twenty and looks at the text.)

ANTIGONE: ... will you do more than kill me?

CREON: *No, nothing more; that is all I could wish for.*

ANTIGONE: *Why then delay? There is nothing that you can say that I should wish to hear, as nothing I say can weigh with you. I have given my brother burial. What greater honour could I wish for? All of these would say that what I did was honourable, but fear locks up their lips. To speak and act just as he likes is a king's prerogative,.*

CREON: *You are wrong. None of my subjects thinks as you do.*

ANTIGONE: *Yes, Sire, they do; but dare not tell you so.*

CREON: *And you are not only alone, but unashamed.*

ANTIGONE: *There is no shame in honouring my brother.*

CREON: *Was not his enemy, who died with him, your brother?*

ANTIGONE: *Yes, both were brothers, both of the same parents.*

CREON: *You honour one, and so insult the other.*

ANTIGONE: *He who is dead will not accuse me of that.*

CREON: *He will, if you honour him no more than the traitor.*

ANTIGONE: *It was not a slave, but his brother, who died with him.*

CREON: *Attacking his country, while the other defended it.*

ANTIGONE: *Even so, we have a duty to the dead.*

CREON: *Not to give equal honour to good and bad.*

ANTIGONE: *Who knows? In the country of the dead that may be the law.*

CREON: *An enemy can't be a friend, even when dead.*

ANTIGONE: *My way is to share my love, not share my hate.*

CREON: *Go then, and share your love among the dead. We'll have no woman's law here, while I live.*

(They fall silent and watch each other.)

CREON: It feels a bit overdone... you are saying your lines too forcefully, as if they are truly your convictions. Don't forget you are a mere maiden. Here you're talking as if you are no longer of the real world. You behave like a demi-god, yet you are nothing but an ordinary mortal.

ANTIGONE: I am not ordinary.

CREON: But you mustn't speak as if you are utterly free of fear. You fear death, after all, like everyone else.

ANTIGONE: There you are wrong, Creon - you don't understand Antigone at all.

CREON: You mean in the play or...

(Antigone does not answer. She stares directly into his eyes. He drops his gaze.)

CREON: My vision of the direction assumed that...

ANTIGONE: I know, Creon, I know how you understood the direction. You needn't waste energy in explaining... I reject it.

CREON: Antigone...

ANTIGONE: You will not direct my death.

CREON: Why do you mean by that?

ANTIGONE: Precisely what you heard.

(They are silent and watch each other.)

ANTIGONE: You beast! Isn't it enough that you are killing me? Now you're trying to drag me into your little play, to humiliate me, but I'll put an end to your little plot - I refuse to co-operate.

CREON: What? But you must play the part!

ANTIGONE: No, I will not act in your filthy intrigues. The play is superb but I won't let you perform it - you wrote it in vain.

(From her sleeve she takes out a small flask with poison and shows it to Creon.)

Look at this poison well, look at this poison. As soon as I drink it I shall die within a minute. Don't come any closer! If I wish, I shall drink it at once and your performance will be ruined.

CREON: You mustn't joke like this...

ANTIGONE: Silence! Heed what I say. Don't come any closer or I'll drink it.

CREON: You wouldn't dare, you coward.

ANTIGONE: I was a coward.

CREON: And you still are. You couldn't change so quickly.

ANTIGONE: Don't be so sure - I am not the woman of a week ago. I have made my peace with death, you couldn't know what that means, to make one's peace with death, the greatest blessing that only few attain.

CREON: But you...

ANTIGONE: Do not interrupt me. Listen to what I have to say: you are a beast. You love to be told you're a beast - but you are the most insignificant of all beasts. You are the lowest of the low, pressed by fear from all sides. Your life has turned into fearfulness, you no longer live. You quake with terror, and when you've killed us all, you'll fear again, and you'll kill, and again you'll fear, and you'll never have respite - no serenity - you kings enjoy the least of life's joys.

CREON. We take them all.

ANTIGONE: Joy is not taken, happiness is not taken. Before, I hated you, not I pity you.

CREON: Pity yourself.

ANTIGONE: Why? No mortal can attain more than this. I no longer fear death. People are not divided into kings and those who cannot be kings. People are divided into those who fear death and those who do not. Your play has helped me...

CREON: It is nothing but a script. Mere words.

ANTIGONE: They are not ordinary words.

CREON: It is hardly worth dying for a few words before your time has come. Put down that poison, death awaits you no matter what you do. Use the week you have left. I'll bring you the finest young men from town for loving, you can ride, swim, do as you please, and in the end you'll act the true hero.

ANTIGONE: I'd rather not act. I don't want to live any more. This world where the plays are written in advance disgusts me, where all the parts have been assigned, such filthy tricks and deception - it is all so deplorable. Even if you were to give me my life now I'd refuse, because I know it is worthless. I used to be blind and frolic in my ignorance. Now that I have seen the light, I can no longer tolerate this life. Believe me: I am delighted by death.

CREON: But I offer you seven more days of life.

ANTIGONE: Creon, you miserable fearful old man, I refuse those seven days of 'life' - I'd rather exchange those seven days for the feeling of glee in knowing that my death will thwart your little play.

(Antigone slowly lifts the flask of poison to her lips.)

CREON: No!

ANTIGONE: *(She suddenly gulps down the poison.)* Yes, Creon, yes - I shall be dead in a minute - I shall be beyond your intrigues. Your little play will not go on, Creon. - My suicide you did not foresee.

(Silence.)

CREON *(Chuckling.)*: Oh yes I did, I foresaw it all. Your sister Ismene is your twin - she will play the role. She will acquiesce because she loves life. My play will never be threatened. Never.

ANTIGONE: You monster! *(She collapses, dead.)*

CREON: Farewell, you who could not be king.

(CURTAIN)