Although written before *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone* comes later in the legendary story of Oedipus and his descendants. One of its themes is the visitation of retribution on later generations—a ‘cursed family’ theme similar to the cursed house of Atreus in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*. *Antigone* is strongly concerned with proper religious rituals, especially those due to the bodies of dead warriors—*in this it resembles the conclusion of Homer’s Iliad*, and the struggle between Achilles and Priam for the body of Hector. Prophecy is important in *Antigone*; Tiresias, who had appeared in the *Odyssey* and would appear again in *Oedipus the King*, knows the future, but (like Cassandra in *Agamemnon*) is ignored. The integrity and safety of a city, state under a dictatorship is a key part of *Antigone* (*as in Oedipus the King*). As in *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus*—but *unlike* the Homeric poems—the gods are frequently invoked in *Antigone*, but play no direct role in the action, as do not appear onstage as characters.
Creon rules in Thebes. The sons of Oedipus and Jocasta—Eteocles and Polynices—have killed each other in civil war. Creon buried Eteocles properly, because he was defending the city, but leaves the body of the attacker Polynices to birds and dogs. As the play opens, Antigone—full sister of the dead brother—insists on burying Polynices according to ritual. Her sister Ismene won’t help her. Creon threatens anyone who buries Polynices with death. Antigone defies him. A messenger brings word that she has buried her brother. Creon condemns Antigone, over the objections of his son Haemon (Antigone’s fiancé). Tiresias, the blind prophet, also warns Creon of coming disaster if he maintains his course. Creon insists Tiresias, but finally relents and buries Polynices properly. But it’s too late—Antigone is already dead, Haemon commits suicide, and Haemon’s mother Eurydice does too. Creon is left alone, friendless and without family, to contemplate the consequences of his impiety.