

Ode III

CHORUS.

Love, unconquerable
Waster of rich men, keeper

[STROPHE]

Of warm lights and all-night vigil
In the soft face of a girl:

5 Sea-wanderer, forest-visitor!
Even the pure Immortals cannot escape you,
And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,
Trembles before your glory.

Surely you swerve upon ruin

[ANTISTROPHE]

10 The just man's consenting heart,
As here you have made bright anger
Strike between father and son—
And none has conquered but Love!
A girl's glance working the will of heaven:
15 Pleasure to her alone who mocks us,
Merciless Aphrodite.²

Scene 4

CHORAGOS. [As ANTIGONE enters guarded] But I can no longer stand
in awe of this,

Nor, seeing what I see, keep back my tears.
Here is Antigone, passing to that chamber
Where all find sleep at last.

ANTIGONE.

5 Look upon me, friends, and pity me
Turning back at the night's edge to say
Good-by to the sun that shines for me no longer;
Now sleepy Death
Summons me down to Acheron,³ that cold shore:
10 There is no bridesong there, nor any music.

[STROPHE 1]

CHORUS. Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of honor,
You walk at last into the underworld;
Untouched by sickness, broken by no sword.
What woman has ever found your way to death?

ANTIGONE.

15 How often I have heard the story of Niobe,⁴
Tantalos⁵ wretched daughter, how the stone
Clung fast about her, ivy-close: and they say
The rain falls endlessly
And sifting soft snow; her tears are never done.
20 I feel the loneliness of her death in mine.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

CHORUS. But she was born of heaven, and you
Are woman, woman-born. If her death is yours,

2. **Aphrodite** (af' rē dīt' ē) goddess of beauty and love who is sometimes vengeful in her retaliation for offenses.

3. **Acheron** (ak' ar' ān') river in the underworld over which the dead are ferried.

4. **Niobe** (nī' ō' bē') a queen of Thebes who was turned to stone while weeping for her slain children. Her seven sons and seven daughters were killed by Artemis and Apollo, the divine twins of Leto. These gods ruined Niobe after Leto complained that Niobe insulted her by bragging of maternal superiority. It was Zeus who turned the bereaved Niobe to stone, but her lament continued and her tears created a stream.

5. **Tantalos**' (tan' tā' las) Niobe's father, who was condemned to eternal frustration in the underworld because he revealed the secrets of the gods. Tantalos, also spelled Tantalus, was tormented by being kept just out of reach of the water and food that was near him but which he could never reach to enjoy.

A mortal woman's, is this not for you
Glory in our world and in the world beyond?

ANTIGONE.

[STROPHE 2]

You laugh at me. Ah, friends, friends,
Can you not wait until I am dead? O Thebes,
O men many-charioted, in love with Fortune,
Dear springs of Dirce, sacred Theban grove,
Be witnesses for me, denied all pity,
Unjustly judged! and think a word of love
For her whose path turns
Under dark earth, where there are no more tears.

CHORUS. You have passed beyond human daring and come at last
Into a place of stone where Justice sits.
I cannot tell

What shape of your father's guilt appears in this.

ANTIGONE.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

You have touched it at last: that bridal bed
Unspeakable, horror of son and mother mingling:
Their crime, infection of all our family!
O Oedipus, father and brother!
Your marriage strikes from the grave to murder mine.
I have been a stranger here in my own land:
All my life
The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

CHORUS. Reverence is a virtue, but strength
Lives in established law: that must prevail.
You have made your choice,
Your death is the doing of your conscious hand.

ANTIGONE.

[EPODE]

Then let me go, since all your words are bitter,
And the very light of the sun is cold to me.
Lead me to my vigil, where I must have
Neither love nor lamentation; no song, but silence.

[CREON *interrupts impatiently.*]

CREON. If dirges and planned lamentations could put off death,
Men would be singing forever.

[To the SERVANTS] Take her, go!

You know your orders: take her to the vault
And leave her alone there. And if she lives or dies,
That's her affair, not ours: our hands are clean.

ANTIGONE. O tomb, vaulted bride-bed in eternal rock,

Soon I shall be with my own again
Where Persephone⁶ welcomes the thin ghosts underground:
And I shall see my father again, and you, mother,

blasphemy (blas' fə mē) *n.*
disrespectful action or
speech against a deity

Literary Analysis

Tragic Character What
flaw in Antigone does the
chorus point out?

lamentation (lam' ən tã'
shən) *n.* expression of
grief; weeping

6. Persephone (pər sef' ə nē)
queen of the underworld.

✓ Reading Check

Whom does Antigone
blame for her fate?

And dearest Polyneices—

dearest indeed

65 To me, since it was my hand
That washed him clean and poured the ritual wine:
And my reward is death before my time!

70 And yet, as men's hearts know, I have done no wrong,
I have not sinned before God. Or if I have,
I shall know the truth in death. But if the guilt
Lies upon Creon who judged me, then, I pray,
May his punishment equal my own.

CHORAGOS.

O passionate heart,

Unyielding, tormented still by the same winds!

CREON. Her guards shall have good cause to regret their delaying.

75 **ANTIGONE.** Ah! That voice is like the voice of death!

CREON. I can give you no reason to think you are mistaken.

ANTIGONE. Thebes, and you my fathers' gods,

80 And rulers of Thebes, you see me now, the last
Unhappy daughter of a line of kings,
Your kings, led away to death. You will remember
What things I suffer, and at what men's hands,
Because I would not transgress the laws of heaven.

[To the GUARDS, simply]

Come: let us wait no longer.

[Exit ANTIGONE, left, guarded.]

Ode IV

CHORUS.

All Danae's beauty⁷ was locked away
In a brazen cell where the sunlight
could not come:

[STROPHE 1]

A small room, still as any grave,
enclosed her.

5 Yet she was a princess too,
And Zeus in a rain of gold poured love
upon her.

O child, child,
No power in wealth or war
Or tough sea-blackened ships
Can prevail against untiring
Destiny!

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

10 And Dryas' son⁸ also, that furious
king,

7. Danae's (dan' ā ez') beauty Danae was imprisoned in a brazen, dark tower when it was foretold that she would mother a son who would kill her father. Her beauty attracted Zeus, who visited her in the form of a shower of gold. Perseus was born of the union, and Danae was exiled with the child over stormy seas from which Zeus saved them. Years later, as prophesied, the boy did kill the man he failed to recognize as his grandfather.

8. Dryas' (drī' əs) son Lycorgos (lī kur' gəs), whose opposition to the worship of Dionysos was severely punished by the gods. He drove the followers of the god from Thrace and was driven insane for having done so. Lycorgos recovered from his madness while imprisoned in a cave, but he was later blinded by Zeus as additional punishment for his offense.

▼ Critical Viewing

What does Antigone's body language say in this photograph? [Analyze]



Bore the god's prisoning anger for his pride:
Sealed up by Dionysos⁹ in deaf stone,
His madness died among echoes.
So at the last he learned what dreadful power
His tongue had mocked:
For he had profaned the revels,
And fired the wrath of the nine
Implacable Sisters¹⁰ that love the sound of the flute.

And old men tell a half-remembered tale
Of horror done where a dark ledge splits the sea
And a double surf beats on the gray shores:
How a king's new woman, sick
With hatred for the queen he had imprisoned,
Ripped out his two sons' eyes with her bloody hands
While grinning Ares¹¹ watched the shuttle plunge
Four times: four blind wounds crying for revenge.

Crying, tears and blood mingled.—Piteously born,
Those sons whose mother was of heavenly birth!
Her father was the god of the North Wind
And she was cradled by gales,
She raced with young colts on the glittering hills
And walked untrammelled in the open light:
But in her marriage deathless Fate found means
To build a tomb like yours for all her joy.

Scene 5

[Enter blind TEIRESIAS, led by a boy. The opening speeches of TEIRESIAS should be in singsong contrast to the realistic lines of CREON.]

TEIRESIAS. This is the way the blind man comes, Princes, Princes,
Lock-step, two heads lit by the eyes of one.

CREON. What new thing have you to tell us, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS. I have much to tell you: listen to the prophet, Creon.

CREON. I am not aware that I have ever failed to listen.

TEIRESIAS. Then you have done wisely, King, and ruled well.

CREON. I admit my debt to you.¹² But what have you to say?

TEIRESIAS. This, Creon: you stand once more on the edge of fate.

CREON. What do you mean? Your words are a kind of dread.

TEIRESIAS. Listen, Creon:

I was sitting in my chair of augury,¹³ at the place
Where the birds gather about me. They were all a-chatter,
As is their habit, when suddenly I heard
A strange note in their jangling, a scream, a

9. Dionysos (dí ə ní səs) god of wine, in whose honor the Greek plays were performed.

10. nine / Implacable Sisters nine Muses, or goddesses, of science and literature. They are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (nē más' i nē)—Memory—who inspired invention and influenced the production of art. They are called implacable (im plak' ə bəl) because they were unforgiving and denied inspiration to anyone who offended them.

11. Ares (er' əz) god of war.

12. my debt to you Creon is here admitting that he would not have acquired the throne if Teiresias had not moved the former King, Oedipus, to an investigation of his own background that led eventually to his downfall. The news of his personal history, uncovered with help from Teiresias, forced Oedipus into exile.

13. chair of augury the seat near the temple from which Teiresias would deliver his predictions about the future. Augury was the skill of telling such fortunes from a consideration of omens, like the flight of birds or the positions of stars.

Reading Check

How does Creon intend to get rid of Antigone?

15 Whirring fury; I knew that they were fighting,
Tearing each other, dying
In a whirlwind of wings clashing. And I was afraid.
I began the rites of burnt-offering at the altar,
But Hephaistos¹⁴ failed me: instead of bright flame,
20 There was only the sputtering slime of the fat thigh-flesh
Melting; the entrails dissolved in gray smoke,
The bare bone burst from the welter. And no blaze!
This was a sign from heaven. My boy described it,
Seeing for me as I see for others.

25 I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought
This new calamity upon us. Our hearths and altars
Are stained with the corruption of dogs and carrion birds
That glut themselves on the corpse of Oedipus' son.
The gods are deaf when we pray to them, their fire
30 Recoils from our offering, their birds of omen
Have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged
With the thick blood of the dead.

O my son,

35 These are no trifles! Think: all men make mistakes,
But a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong,
And repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man, then: do not fight with a corpse—
What glory is it to kill a man who is dead?
Think, I beg you:

40 It is for your own good that I speak as I do.
You should be able to yield for your own good.

CREON. It seems that prophets have made me their especial
province.

All my life long
I have been a kind of butt for the dull arrows
45 Of doddering fortunetellers!

No, Teiresias:

If your birds—if the great eagles of God himself
Should carry him stinking bit by bit to heaven,
I would not yield. I am not afraid of pollution:
50 No man can defile the gods.

Do what you will,
Go into business, make money, speculate
In India gold or that synthetic gold from Sardis,¹⁵
Get rich otherwise than by my consent to bury him.
55 Teiresias, it is a sorry thing when a wise man
Sells his wisdom, lets out his words for hire!

TEIRESIAS. Ah Creon! Is there no man left in the world—

CREON. To do what?—Come, let's have the aphorism!¹⁶

14. Hephaistos (hē fes' təs) god of fire and the forge, who would be invoked, as he is here by Teiresias, for aid in the starting of ceremonial fires.

Literary Analysis

Tragic Character Which details in Creon's speech emphasize his role as a tragic character?

15. Sardis (sär' dis) capital of ancient Lydia, which produced the first coins made from an alloy of gold and silver.

16. aphorism (af' ə niz' əm) *n.* brief, insightful saying. Creon is taunting the prophet and suggesting that the old man is capable of relying only on trite, meaningless expressions instead of any original thinking.

TEIRESIAS. No man who knows that wisdom outweighs any wealth?

CREON. As surely as bribes are baser than any baseness.

TEIRESIAS. You are sick, Creon! You are deathly sick!

CREON. As you say: it is not my place to challenge a prophet.

TEIRESIAS. Yet you have said my prophecy is for sale.

CREON. The generation of prophets has always loved gold.

TEIRESIAS. The generation of kings has always loved brass.

CREON. You forget yourself! You are speaking to your King.

TEIRESIAS. I know it. You are a king because of me.

CREON. You have a certain skill; but you have sold out.

TEIRESIAS. King, you will drive me to words that—

CREON. Say them, say them!
Only remember: I will not pay you for them.

TEIRESIAS. No, you will find them too costly.

CREON. No doubt. Speak:
Whatever you say, you will not change my will.

TEIRESIAS. Then take this, and take it to heart!
The time is not far off when you shall pay back
Corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh.
You have thrust the child of this world into living night,
You have kept from the gods below the child that is theirs:
The one in a grave before her death,
the other,
Dead, denied the grave. This is your crime:



 **Reading Check**

What does Teiresias want Creon to do?

► **Critical Viewing** What does Creon appear to be saying to Teiresias? [*Speculate*]

And the Furies¹⁷ and the dark gods of Hell
Are swift with terrible punishment for you.

Do you want to buy me now, Creon?

85

Not many days,

And your house will be full of men and women weeping,
And curses will be hurled at you from far
Cities grieving for sons unburied, left to rot
Before the walls of Thebes.

90 These are my arrows, Creon: they are all for you.

But come, child: lead me home.

[To BOY]

Let him waste his fine anger upon younger men.

Maybe he will learn at last

To control a wiser tongue in a better head.

[Exit TEIRESIAS.]

95 **CHORAGOS.** The old man has gone, King, but his words
Remain to plague us. I am old, too,
But I cannot remember that he was ever false.

CREON. That is true. . . . It troubles me.

Oh it is hard to give in! but it is worse

100 To risk everything for stubborn pride.

CHORAGOS. Creon: take my advice.

CREON.

What shall I do?

CHORAGOS. Go quickly: free Antigone from her vault
And build a tomb for the body of Polyneices.

105 **CREON.** You would have me do this?

CHORAGOS. Creon, yes!

And it must be done at once: God moves
Swiftly to cancel the folly of stubborn men.

CREON. It is hard to deny the heart! But I

110 Will do it: I will not fight with destiny.

CHORAGOS. You must go yourself, you
cannot leave it to others.

CREON. I will go.

—Bring axes, servants:

Come with me to the tomb. I buried her, I

115 Will set her free.

Oh quickly!

My mind misgives—

The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them
To the last day of his life!

[Exit CREON.]

17. **Furies** (fyoor' ez) goddesses of vengeance who made insane those whose crimes were unpunished, especially those who had sinned against their own families.

Reading Strategy
Identifying With a Character Which details help you identify with Creon's refusal to give in?

Literary Analysis
Tragic Character How does Creon's statement reveal that he has begun to recognize his own tragic flaw?

Pæan

CHORAGOS.
God of many names

[STROPHE 1]

CHORUS.
of Kadmeian Semele¹⁹ son O Iacchos¹⁸
Guardian of the West O born of the Thunder!
of Eleusis' plain²⁰ Regent
and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenos:²²

CHORAGOS.
God of many names

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

CHORUS.
flares on our hills the flame of torches
dance at the spring of Castalia:²³ the nymphs of Iacchos
from the vine-close mountain
*Evohe evohē!*²⁴ come ah come in ivy:
sings through the streets of Thebes

CHORAGOS.
God of many names

[STROPHE 2]

CHORUS.
heavenly Child Iacchos of Thebes
of Semele bride of the Thunderer!
The shadow of plague is upon us:
with clement feet²⁵ come
oh come from Parnasos²⁶
down the long slopes
across the lamenting water

CHORAGOS.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

*Io!*²⁷ Fire! Chorister of the throbbing stars!
O purest among the voices of the night!
Thou son of God, blaze for us!

CHORUS. Come with choric rapture of circling Maenads
Who cry *Io Iacche!*²⁸
God of many names!

18. Iacchos (ē' ə kəs) one of several alternate names for Dionysos.

19. Kadmeian Semele (sem' ə lē') Semele was a mortal and the mother of Dionysos. She was the daughter of Thebes' founder, Kadmos.

20. Eleusis' (e lōō' sis) plain Located north of Athens, this plain was a site of worship for Dionysos and Demeter.

21. maenad (mē' nad') **Thebes** The city is here compared to a maenad, one of Dionysos' female worshippers. Such a follower would be thought of as uncontrolled or disturbed.

22. Dragon Field . . . Ismenos (is mē' nas) The Dragon Field was located by the banks of Ismenos, a river near Thebes. Kadmos created warriors by sowing in the Dragon Field the teeth of the dragon he killed there.

23. Castalia (kas tā' lē ə) location of a site sacred to Apollo.

24. Evohe (ē vō' ē) triumphant shout of affirmation.

25. clement feet *Clement* means "kind" or "favorable."

26. Parnasos (pār nas' əs) mountain that was sacred to both Dionysos and Apollo, located in central Greece.

27. Io (ē' ō) Greek word for "behold" or "hail."

chorister (kōr' is tər) n. member of a chorus

28. Io Iacche (ē' ō' ē' ə ke) cry of celebration used by Dionysian worshippers.

✓ Reading Check

What does Teiresias say is Creon's crime?

Exodus

[Enter MESSENGER, left.]

MESSENGER. Men of the line of Kadmos,²⁹ you who live
Near Amphion's citadel:³⁰

I cannot say
Of any condition of human life "This is fixed,
5 This is clearly good, or bad." Fate raises up,
And Fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike:
No man can foretell his Fate.

Take the case of Creon:
Creon was happy once, as I count happiness:
10 Victorious in battle, sole governor of the land,
Fortunate father of children nobly born.
And now it has all gone from him! Who can say
That a man is still alive when his life's joy fails?
He is a walking dead man. Grant him rich,
15 Let him live like a king in his great house:
If his pleasure is gone, I would not give
So much as the shadow of smoke for all he owns.

CHORAGOS. Your words hint at sorrow: what is your news for us?

MESSENGER. They are dead. The living are guilty of their death.

20 **CHORAGOS.** Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!

MESSENGER. Haimon.
Haimon is dead; and the hand that killed him
Is his own hand.

CHORAGOS. His father's? or his own?

25 **MESSENGER.** His own, driven mad by the
murder his father had done.

CHORAGOS. Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly
you saw it all!

29. **Kadmos** (kad' mas) founder of the city of Thebes, whose daughter, Semele, gave birth to Dionysos.

30. **Amphion's citadel** Amphion was a king of Thebes credited with erecting the walls of the fortress, or citadel, by using a magic lyre.

▼ **Critical Viewing**
Describe the emotions you see in Eurydice's face.
[Connect]



MESSENGER. This is my news: you must draw what conclusions you can from it.

CHORAGOS. But look: Eurydice, our Queen:
Has she overheard us?

[Enter EURYDICE from the Palace, center.]

30 **EURYDICE.** I have heard something, friends:
As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas'³¹ shrine,
For I needed her help today, I heard a voice
Telling of some new sorrow. And I fainted
There at the temple with all my maidens about me.
35 But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it:
Grief and I are no strangers.

MESSENGER.

40 Dearest Lady,
I will tell you plainly all that I have seen.
I shall not try to comfort you: what is the use,
Since comfort could lie only in what is not true?
The truth is always best.

I went with Creon
To the outer plain where Polyneices was lying,
No friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs.
45 We made our prayers in that place to Hecate³²
And Pluto,³³ that they would be merciful. And we bathed
The corpse with holy water, and we brought
Fresh-broken branches to burn what was left of it,
And upon the urn we heaped up a towering barrow
50 Of the earth of his own land.

When we were done, we ran
To the vault where Antigone lay on her couch of stone.
One of the servants had gone ahead,
And while he was yet far off he heard a voice
55 Grieving within the chamber, and he came back
And told Creon. And as the King went closer,
The air was full of wailing, the words lost,
And he begged us to make all haste. "Am I a prophet?"
He said, weeping, "And must I walk this road,
60 The saddest of all that I have gone before?
My son's voice calls me on. Oh quickly, quickly!
Look through the crevice there, and tell me
If it is Haimon, or some deception of the gods!"

We obeyed; and in the cavern's farthest corner
65 We saw her lying:
She had made a noose of her fine linen veil
And hanged herself. Haimon lay beside her,
His arms about her waist, lamenting her,
His love lost underground, crying out

31. **Pallas'** (pal' əs) Pallas
Athena, the goddess of
wisdom.

Reading Strategy

Identifying With a Character Eurydice calmly worries about "some new sorrow." Why might she say that she is accustomed to grief?

32. **Hecate** (hek' ə tē) goddess of the underworld.

33. **Pluto** (plōōt' ō) god of the underworld who managed the souls of the departed.

Reading Check

What news does the messenger bring?