Ode III

CHORUS.
Love, unconquerable
Waster of rich men, keeper
Of warm lights and all-night vigil
In the soft face of a girl:

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
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:
Pleasure to her alone who mocks us,
Merciless Aphrodite.

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, that cold shore:

There is no bridesong there, nor any music.

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,
Tantalos’ 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.
I feel the loneliness of her death in mine.

CHORUS. But she was born of heaven, and you
Are woman, woman-born. If her death is yours,
A mortal woman's, is this not for you
Glory in our world and in the world beyond?

ANTIGONE.
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.
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.
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. 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 Persephone welcomes the thin ghosts underground:
And I shall see my father again, and you, mother,
And dearest Polyneices—

dearest indeed

To me, since it was my hand

That washed him clean and poured the ritual wine:

And my reward is death before my time!

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.

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,

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 beauty was locked away

In a brazen cell where the sunlight

could not come:

A small room, still as any grave,

enclosed her.

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]

And Dryas' son also, that furious

king,
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.

[STROPHE 2]

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.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

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 unrammeled 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 (d'ë ní'sos) 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 (né màs' i ně') —
Memory—who inspired inven-
tion and influenced the pro-
duction of art. They are called
implacable (im plák' a bål)
because they were unforgiving
and denied inspiration to
anyone who offended them.
11. Ares (er' èz) 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 consider-
ation of omens, like the
flight of birds or the positions
of stars.

Reading Check

How does Creon intend
to get rid of Antigone?
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 Hefhaisostos failed me: instead of bright flame.
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.

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
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,
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:
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
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:
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,
Get rich otherwise than by my consent to hurl him.

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!
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:

Critical Viewing What does Creon appear to be saying to Teiresias? [Speculate]
And the Furies and the dark gods of Hell
Are swift with terrible punishment for you.
Do you want to buy me now, Creon?

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.

These are my arrows, Creon: they are all for you.
But come, child: lead me home.
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.]

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
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 Polynices.

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
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
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.]
CHORAGOS.
God of many names

CHORUS.

O Iacchos
Son of Kadmeian Semele
Guardian of the West
Regent of Eleusis' plain
and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenus;

CHORAGOS.
God of many names

ANTISTROPHE 1

CHORUS.

the flame of torches
the nymphs of Iacchos
dance at the spring of Castalia;
from the vine-close mountain
Evohe! Evohe!
sings through the streets of Thebes

CHORAGOS.
God of many names

ANTISTROPHE 2

CHORUS.

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

CHORAGOS.

ANTISTROPHE 2

Io
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!
God of many names!
Exodus

MESSENGER. Men of the line of Kadmos, you who live Near Amphion's citadel. I cannot say Of any condition of human life "This is fixed, 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: 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,

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.

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?

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

CHORAGOS. Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly you saw it all!
CHORAGOS. But look: Eurydice, our Queen:
Has she overheard us?

[Enter EURYDICE from the Palace, center.]

EURYDICE. I have heard something, friends:
As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas' 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.
But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it:
Grief and I are no strangers.

MESSENGER. 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 Polynices was lying,
No friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs.
We made our prayers in that place to Hecate
And Pluto, 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
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
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,
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
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

Reading Check
What news does the messenger bring?