

CREON

Why not? All prophets seek their own advantage.

TIRESIAS

And all tyrants lust for misgotten gain.

CREON

This slander of yours – you forget you are speaking to a king?

TIRESIAS

Well aware – who helped you save this city?

CREON

You. You have your skills old man, but you are not therefore honest.

TIRESIAS

You will drive me to utter the dreadful secret in my heart.

CREON

Spit it out! But expect no gain from it.

TIRESIAS

You think still that is my motive?

CREON

Know full well, you'll never buy off my resolve.

TIRESIAS

Know this then, too. Learn it by heart
The chariot of the sun will not race many circuits more
Before you have surrendered one born of your own loins
Your own flesh and blood, a corpse for corpses in return
Since you have thrust to the world below
A child sprung from the world above
Ruthlessly lodged a living soul within the grave –
Then you have robbed the gods below the earth
Keeping a dead body here in the bright air
Unburied, unsung, unhallowed by rites.

You cannot alter this. The gods themselves cannot undo it
It follows of necessity from what you have done
Even now, the avenging Furies, the hunters of Hades that
Follow and destroy
Are lying in wait for you and will have their prey
When the evil you have worked for others falls on you.

Reflect on that. Tell me I've been bribed
The day comes soon, no long test of time, not now
When the mourning cries of men and women break
Throughout your halls

Great hatred rises against you – cities in tumult
All whose mutilated sons the dogs have graced with burial
Or the wild beasts and the wheeling crows
Bring with defilement of blood to their hearths and altars.

I am done. You challenged me and so these shafts of wrath
Will find their mark in your heart. You cannot escape their sting
Their sharpness.

Come boy. Lead me home
So he can vent his rage on younger men
And learn to keep a gentler tongue in his head
Than that which now possesses him.

Exits

LEADER

The old man is gone, my king.
He has prophesied terrible things
And for my part, since before the hair on this old head went grey
His words have never proved false for Thebes.

CREON

I know it myself – I am shaken, torn
It is a dreadful thing to yield, but to resist now...?
Lay my pride bare to the blows of ruin?
That is dreadful, too

LEADER

But well advised, my good king Creon...

CREON

What should I do? Tell me ... I'll obey.

LEADER

Go free the girl from the rocky vault.
Prepare a tomb for Polynices, him whose body lies unburied.

CREON

That is your advice? It is your wish I consent to this?

CHORUS

It is and quickly. The gods do not delay the stroke of their swift
vengeance

CREON

This be hard, but must be done. I will do it... no more fighting the losing
battle

CHORUS

Do it now

LEADER

Don't leave it to others

CREON

I will go this instant. Come! Each of you
Bring spades and maddocks onto the hill.
I and my better judgment come round quickly to this
I shackled her. I will set her free myself
I now believe it is by the laws of the gods that man must live
To keep these ancient laws until the day we die.

CHORUS (INDIVIDUALS)

God of a hundred names!
Great Dionysus –

Son and glory of Semele! Pride of Thebes!
Child of Zeus whose thunder rocks the clouds
Lord of famous lands of evening
King of the Mysteries!
King of Eleusius, Demeter's Plain
Her breasting hills that welcome the world
Great Dionysus!
Bacchus, living in Thebes
The mother-city of your frenzied women
Bacchus
Living along Ismenus' rippling waters
Standing over the field sown with dragon's teeth!

CHORUS (IN CHANT)

Where the torches on the crested mountain gleam
And by Castalia's stream
The nymph-train in thy dance rejoices
When from ivy-tangled glens
Of Nysa and from vine-clad plains
Thou comest to Thebes where immortal voices
Sing thy glad strains.

CHORUS (INDIVIDUALS)

Dionysus!
Down to watch and ward the roads of Thebes!
First of all cities, Thebes, you honor!
You and your mother – bride of lightning
Come Dionysus, Now your people lie in the iron grip of plague
Come in your racing, healing stride down Parnassus slopes
Or across the morning straits

CHORUS (CHANTING)

The stars, whose breath is fire, delight
To dance for thee; the echoing night
Shall with thy praises sing
Zeus-born, appear! God's offspring
Dance with your nymphs frenzied swirling!
Come, bountiful Iacchus, King!
Dance Dionysus, giver of all good things!

Enter a MESSENGER

MESSENGER

Here men of Cadmus' city! Hear and attend!
Neighbors, friends of the house of Amphion, people of Thebes!
There's not a thing in this mortal life of ours
I'd praise or blame as settled once and for all
Fortune lifts and fortune fells the lucky and unlucky
Every day
No prophet on earth can tell a man his fate
Take Creon: There was a man to rouse your envy once, as I see it.
He saved the realm from enemies, and assumed sovereign power
He set us on a true course, he alone, and flourished like a tree
With noble line of sons bred and reared.
And now it's lost – all gone. For life without life's joys
Is living death; and such life is his.
Riches and rank and show of majesty and state
Where no joy is are empty, vain, and unsubstantial shadows
Of no weight to be compared with happiness of the heart.

LEADER

What now? What new grief do you bear to the house of kings?

MESSENGER

Death, Dead – and the living are guilty.

LEADER

Who is the murderer? Who dead? Tell us!

MESSENGER

Haemon's gone, blood spilled by the very hand...

LEADER

His father's or his own?

MESSENGER

His own, raging mad at his father for the death...

LEADER

Oh great Seer, you saw it all! It has happened as the prophet said!

MESSENGER

Those are the fact. Deal with them as you will.

EURYDICE enters from the palace

LEADER

Poor Eurydice, poor queen, poor soul.
So close at hand, by chance perhaps,
Unless she has heard the news of her son.

EURYDICE

My friends, I caught the sound of your words
As I came to the door on my way to prayer
To appeal to the queen, Athena at the temple of Pallas
I was just loosening the bolts, opening the doors
When a voice filled with sorrow struck my ears
And I fell back, terrified, into my women's arms – everything went black
Tell me the news again, whatever it is...
Sorrow and I are hardly strangers. I can bear the worst.

MESSENGER

I – dear lady – I'll speak as an eye-witness. I was there.
And I won't pass over one word of truth.
Why should I try to soothe you with a story
Only to prove a liar in a moment?
Truth is always best.

So, it was thus. I attended your husband, the king
To the edge of the plain where the body lay.
Polynices, mauled by the dogs and in pitiable state.
Saying a prayer for Hecate of the Crossroads, and Hades too
To hold their anger and be kind
We washed the dead with holy water and on a fire of fresh cut branches
Gathering...what was left of him... we burned him
And raised over his ashes a high mound of his native earth.
That done, we made for that rocky vault of hers

The hollow, empty bed of the maid that was married with death
Before we reached it, one who stood near the accursed place
Heard a voice, a long wail rising, echoing out of that unhallowed
chamber and ran to alert the king. Creon pressed on
Closer – the strange, inscrutable cry came sharper
Throbbing around him now, and he let loose a cry of his own
Enough to wrench the heart.

“Oh gods! Is my foreboding true? Going down the darkest road ever I’ve
gone?
My son – it’s his dear voice that greets me. Go! Closer, quickly!
Through the passage where the stones are thrown apart
Right to the tomb’s very mouth. Look and see
If it is Haemon’s voice I think I hear
Or if the gods have robbed me of my senses!”

The king was shattered. We went, and looked as bidden.
We took his orders and searched – and there
In the deepest darkest recesses of the tomb, we found her...
Hanged by the neck with a fine linen noose
Strangled in weaving of her veils.
And there with his arms about her, stood he
Clinging to her, wailing for his bride
Dead and down below, for his father’s crimes.

When Creon saw them, he gave a deep sob
And ran in, shouting, crying to him
“My son, what have you done?
What seized you? What madness brings you here to your destruction?
Come away, my son! I beg you on my knees...”

But the boy gave him a burning glance, spat in his face
Not a word in reply – he drew his sword and struck out
But his father fled, unscathed. Then doomed, and desperate with himself
Suddenly leaning his full weight on the blade,
He buried it in his own body, half way to the hilt
And while his life ebbed out, he embraced the girl
Pouring his arms around her and breathing hard
A quick rush of his blood stained her pale cheeks red
And there he lies, body enfolding body, wedded in death
Their bridal sleep a witness to the world that Creon shows

Of all ills afflicting men, worst is lack of judgment.

EURDYCE leaves

LEADER

The queen has left without a word.

MESSENGER

Yes. It is strange. The best I can hope for
Is that she would not sorrow for her son before us all
But vents her grief in private. Inside, under her roof
She'll set her women to the task, and wail the sorrow of the house.
She's too wise I think to take a false step rashly.

LEADER

It may be. Yet there may be danger in unnatural silence
No less than in excess of lamentation.

MESSENGER

We'll see if she's holding something back
Hiding some passion in her heart
I am going in. You may be right – who knows?
There is some fatal purpose in her grief.
Such silence, as you say, may well be dangerous.

MESSENGER exits to the Palace, Enter CREON from the side with attendants and HAEMON's and ANTIGONE's bodies on biers.

CHORUS

The King comes here.
What tongue scarce dares to tell
Must now be known
By burden that proves to well
The guilt, no other man's
But his alone.

CREON

So senseless. So insane.... My crimes, my stubborn, deadly....
Look at us – the killer, the killed, father and son
The same blood, the misery.

My plans, my fanatic heart, my son cut off so young
Lost. Dead to the world for my fault, my stupidity.

LEADER

Too late. Too late you see what justice means.

CREON

I learn in sorrow, through blood and tears
The gods have delivered heavy punishment
Struck me with great weight; shattering, driving me down that wild
savage path
Ruining trampling down my joy
Oh, such agony, heartbreaking affliction of mortal man.

Enter MESSENGER

MESSENGER

Master, what a horde of grief you have. And you'll have more.
The grief that lies at hand you brought yourself,
The rest, within, you'll know all too soon.

CREON

What more? What's worse than this?

MESSENGER

The Queen, your wife, is dead.
Mother of him that is dead, the death-wound fresh in her heart.

CREON

Insatiable Death, why me? Why are you killing me?
Herald of pain, more words, more grief?
I died once, you kill me again and again!
And there is more, blood upon blood, my wife?
Dear gods, slaughter heaped upon slaughter.

EURYDICE is brought out on her bier

LEADER

Look then and see.

CREON

What fate awaits me now? I just held my child in my arms and now
Look, a new corpse rising before my eyes. Wretched, helpless
mother...son...

MESSENGER

There at the altar with whetted knife she stood
And as the darkness dimmed her eyes, called on the dead
Megareus, her elder son, hero, killed in the first assault
Then for Haemon... and with her dying breath she cursed you
Called down torments on your head. Cursed you, their slayer.

CREON

Oh the dread. Is there no sword for me? Why not kill me too?
Run me through – the anguish, the misery...

MESSENGER

And the dead, the woman lying there, piles the guilt of all their deaths
On you.

CREON

How did she end her life?

MESSENGER

Hearing her last son was dead, with her own hand, she drove
Sharp sword home into her heart

CREON

And all the guilt is mine – and can never be fixed by another man
No escape for me. I killed you, gods help me.

Lead me away, quickly, out of sight.
I cannot exist. I am no one. Nothing.

LEADER

Good advice, if there can be any good in this.
Quickest is best when all is ill.

CREON kneels in prayer

CREON

Come, my last hour – that best of fates for me
That brings the final day. Come soon.
Let me not see another sunrise.

LEADER

That will come when it comes
We must deal with what lies before us
The future rests with those who tend the future.

CREON

I ask no more than I have asked

CHORUS

Ask nothing. No more prayers now.

LEADER

For mortal men, there is no escape from what is to be.

CREON

I am nothing – have no life
That have killed unwittingly son and wife
Lead me away, I know not where to turn
Where to look for help
Whatever I touch goes wrong once more
My head is bowed with fate too heavy for me.

CHORUS (SPEAKING INDIVIDUALLY)

The most important part of true success is wisdom
Reverence – to hold the gods in awe, this is the ancient law
The mighty words of the proud are paid in full
With mighty blows of fate.
That seeing the stricken heart of pride brought down
These blows teach us wisdom as we grow old.