

## LITERARY ANALYSIS: CLASSICAL DRAMA

Keep these characteristics of classical drama in mind as you read Sophocles' *Antigone*:

- A major form of classical drama is the **tragedy**, which recounts the downfall of a dignified, superior character—a **tragic hero**. An error or weakness—the hero's **tragic flaw**—may contribute to his or her ruin.
- An important element of classical drama is the **chorus**, a group of actors who comment on the action in the play. Their leader is the **choragus**.
- **Dramatic irony**—the audience's awareness of things the characters do not know—is often present in classical drama.

**Review:** Character, Conflict, Theme

## READING STRATEGY: READING CLASSICAL DRAMA

Use the following strategies to help you understand *Antigone*:

- **Visualize** the staging of the play, with its masked actors.
- **Clarify** unfamiliar references by using the marginal notes.
- **Infer** the traits, values, and motivations of the two main characters, Antigone and Creon. **Evaluate** these characters, who are in conflict.
- **Relate** the songs of the chorus to the action of the play. Use a chart to record notes about the song the chorus sings at the end of each scene.

	Summary of Song	Function of Song
Parodos	Polyneices attacked Thebes but was defeated.	gives background for Creon's order not to bury Polyneices
Ode 1		

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

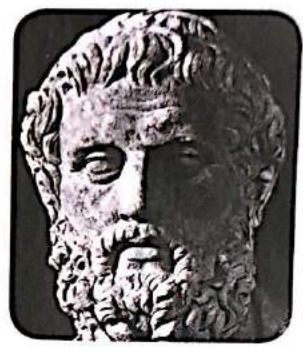
Define each vocabulary word you're familiar with. After reading the play, define the words that were unfamiliar.

WORD LIST			
	anarchist	impassively	reverence
	auspicious	insolence	sate
	contempt	lamentation	sententiously
	defile	perverse	transgress

## Background

### Doomed King

Sophocles was one of the great dramatists of ancient Greece, and his play *Antigone* is regarded as one of the finest examples of classical Greek tragedy. Along with *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, it is part of Sophocles' Theban trilogy. These three plays are based on the legend of Oedipus (öd'ə-pəs), the doomed Theban king who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. Antigone (än-tīg'ə-nē) is the daughter of Oedipus.



Sophocles  
496?–406 B.C.

### Family Feud

As the play begins, Antigone and her sister, Ismene (is-mē'nē), recall their dead father. Upon discovering the truth about his marriage, Oedipus blinded himself and went into exile, where he was cared for by his two daughters until his death. His sons, Eteocles (ī-tē'ə-klēz') and Polyneices (pōl'ə-nī'sēz), agreed to share the kingship of Thebes, ruling in alternate years. However, after Eteocles had served his first term as king, he refused to relinquish the throne to Polyneices, claiming that Polyneices was unfit to rule. Polyneices then enlisted an army from Argos, a long-standing enemy of Thebes, to fight his brother. In the course of battle, the brothers killed each other. Their uncle, Creon, who has become king, now faces the task of restoring order in Thebes. He plans to honor one corpse and dishonor the other.



**MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
For more on Sophocles, visit the Literature Center at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).



# ANTIGONE

## SOPHOCLES

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Antigone**, daughter of Oedipus, former king of Thebes

**Ismene**, daughter of Oedipus

**Creon** (krē'ōn'), king of Thebes, uncle of Antigone and Ismene

**Haemon** (hē'mōn'), Creon's son, engaged to Antigone

**Eurydice** (yōō-rīd'ī-sē), wife of Creon

**Teiresias** (tī-rē'sē-ēs), a blind prophet

**Chorus**, made up of about 15 elders of Thebes

**Choragus**, leader of the chorus

**A Sentry**

**A Messenger**

### SCENE

Before the palace of Creon, king of Thebes. A central double door, and two doors at the side. A platform extends the length of the stage, and from this platform three steps lead down into the orchestra, or chorus ground.

### TIME

Dawn of the day after the repulse of the Argive army from the assault on Thebes

## PROLOGUE

(Antigone and Ismene enter from the central door of the palace.)

**Antigone.** Ismene, dear sister,  
You would think that we had already suffered enough  
For the curse on Oedipus:  
I cannot imagine any grief  
5 That you and I have not gone through. And now—  
Have they told you the new decree of our king Creon?

**Ismene.** I have heard nothing: I know  
That two sisters lost two brothers, a double death  
In a single hour; and I know that the Argive army  
10 Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.

9 Argive (är'jīv'): of Argos.

Martha Henry as Antigone and Philip Bosco as Creon in the Lincoln Center Repertory 1971 production







**Antigone.** I thought so. And that is why I wanted you  
To come out here with me. There is something we must do.

**Ismene.** Why do you speak so strangely?

**Antigone.** Listen, Ismene:

- 15 Creon buried our brother Eteocles  
With military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral,  
And it was right that he should; but Polyneices,  
Who fought as bravely and died as miserably—  
They say that Creon has sworn  
20 No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him,  
But his body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure  
For carrion birds to find as they search for food.  
That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here  
To announce it publicly; and the penalty—  
25 Stoning to death in the public square!

There it is,

And now you can prove what you are:  
A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

**Ismene.** Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

**Antigone.** You must decide whether you will help me or not.

- 30 **Ismene.** I do not understand you. Help you in what?

**Antigone.** Ismene, I am going to bury him. Will you come?

**Ismene.** Bury him! You have just said the new law forbids it.

**Antigone.** He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

**Ismene.** But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do!

- 35 **Antigone.** Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

**Ismene.** Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him  
For what his own search brought to light, his eyes  
Ripped out by his own hand; and Jocasta died,

- 40 His mother and wife at once: she twisted the cords  
That strangled her life; and our two brothers died,  
Each killed by the other's sword. And we are left:  
But oh, Antigone,

Think how much more terrible than these

- 45 Our own death would be if we should go against Creon  
And do what he has forbidden! We are only women;  
We cannot fight with men, Antigone!  
The law is strong, we must give in to the law  
In this thing, and in worse. I beg the dead  
50 To forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield  
To those in authority. And I think it is dangerous business  
To be always meddling.

**20–22 No one shall bury . . . search for food:** The obligation to bury the dead with appropriate rites was considered sacred by the ancient Greeks. They believed that the soul of someone left unburied would never find peace.

**39 Jocasta** (jō-kās'tə): the mother of Antigone and Ismene, who hanged herself when she realized the truth about her relationship with Oedipus.

**Antigone.**

If that is what you think,  
I should not want you, even if you asked to come.  
You have made your choice; you can be what you want to be.  
55 But I will bury him; and if I must die,  
I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down  
With him in death, and I shall be as dear  
To him as he to me. **A**

It is the dead,  
Not the living, who make the longest demands:  
60 We die forever. . . .

You may do as you like,  
Since apparently the laws of the gods mean nothing to you.  
**Ismene.** They mean a great deal to me; but I have no strength  
To break laws that were made for the public good.

**Antigone.** That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me,  
65 I will bury the brother I love.

**A CONFLICT**

Note the seriousness of the conflict that is introduced. What is Antigone going to do, and what may happen to her as a result?



Tandy Cronyn as Ismene and Martha Henry as Antigone in the Lincoln Center Repertory 1971 production



# SCENE 1

**Choragus.** But now at last our new king is coming:

Creon of Thebes, Menoeceus' son.

In this **auspicious** dawn of his reign

What are the new complexities

5 That shifting Fate has woven for him?

What is his counsel? Why has he summoned

The old men to hear him?

*(Enter Creon from the palace. He addresses the Chorus from the top step.)*

**Creon.** Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you that our ship of

state, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come

10 safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful wisdom of heaven.

I have summoned you here this morning because I know that I

can depend upon you: your devotion to King Laius was absolute;

you never hesitated in your duty to our late ruler Oedipus; and

when Oedipus died, your loyalty was transferred to his children.

15 Unfortunately, as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and

Polyneices, have killed each other in battle; and I, as the next in

blood, have succeeded to the full power of the throne.

I am aware, of course, that no ruler can expect complete loyalty

from his subjects until he has been tested in office. Nevertheless,

20 I say to you at the very outset that I have nothing but **contempt**

for the kind of governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to

follow the course that he knows is best for the state; and as for

the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare—

I have no use for him, either. I call God to witness that if I

25 saw my country headed for ruin, I should not be afraid to

speak out plainly; and I need hardly remind you that I would

never have any dealings with an enemy of the people. No one

values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember

that friends made at the risk of wrecking our ship are not real

30 friends at all. **D**

These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I have

made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus:

Eteocles, who died as a man should die, fighting for his country,

is to be buried with full military honors, with all the ceremony

35 that is usual when the greatest heroes die; but his brother

Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and

sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers'

gods, whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and

sell his own people into slavery—Polyneices, I say, is to have no

40 burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him;

he shall lie on the plain, unburied; and the birds and the

scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.

**2 Menoeceus'** (mə-nē'syōōs).

**auspicious** (ô-spīsh'əs) *adj.*  
promising success; favorable

**12 Laius** (lā'əs): the father of Oedipus.

**contempt** (kən-tĕmpt') *n.* an attitude  
of regarding someone or something  
as worthless or inferior

## **D** CHARACTER

This speech introduces Creon, who acts as Antigone's antagonist. According to him, what deserves the highest loyalty? Read on to learn his motives for forbidding Polyneices' burial.

Philip Bosco as Creon in the Lincoln Center Repertory 1971 production







This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it.  
As long as I am king, no traitor is going to be honored with the  
45 loyal man. But whoever shows by word and deed that he is on  
the side of the state—he shall have my respect while he is  
living, and my **reverence** when he is dead.

**reverence** (rĕv'ər-əns) *n.* awe and respect

**Choragus.** If that is your will, Creon son of Menoeceus,  
You have the right to enforce it: we are yours.

50 **Creon.** That is my will. Take care that you do your part.

**Choragus.** We are old men: let the younger ones carry it out.

**Creon.** I do not mean that: the sentries have been appointed.

**Choragus.** Then what is it that you would have us do?

**Creon.** You will give no support to whoever breaks this law.

55 **Choragus.** Only a crazy man is in love with death!

**Creon.** And death it is; yet money talks, and the wisest  
Have sometimes been known to count a few coins too many.

(Enter Sentry.)

**Sentry.** I'll not say that I'm out of breath from running, King, because every  
time I stopped to think about what I have to tell you, I felt like going back.  
60 And all the time a voice kept saying, "You fool, don't you know you're walking  
straight into trouble?"; and then another voice: "Yes, but if you let somebody  
else get the news to Creon first, it will be even worse than that for you!" But  
good sense won out, at least I hope it was good sense, and here I am with a  
story that makes no sense at all; but I'll tell it anyhow, because, as they say,  
65 what's going to happen's going to happen, and—

**Creon.** Come to the point. What have you to say?

**Sentry.** I did not do it. I did not see who did it. You must not punish me for  
what someone else has done.

**Creon.** A comprehensive defense! More effective, perhaps,  
70 If I knew its purpose. Come: what is it?

**Sentry.** A dreadful thing . . . I don't know how to put it—

**Creon.** Out with it!

**Sentry.** Well, then;  
The dead man—

Polyneices—

(Pause. The Sentry is overcome, fumbles for words. Creon waits **impassively**.)

out there—

someone—

**impassively** (ĩm-pās'iv-lē) *adv.* in a way that shows no emotion or feeling

New dust on the slimy flesh!



(Pause. No sign from Creon.)

75 Someone has given it burial that way, and  
Gone. . . .

(Long pause. Creon finally speaks with deadly control.)

Creon. And the man who dared do this? **E**

Sentry. I swear I  
Do not know! You must believe me!

Listen:

80 The ground was dry, not a sign of digging, no,  
Not a wheel track in the dust, no trace of anyone.  
It was when they relieved us this morning: and one of them,  
The corporal, pointed to it.

There it was,

The strangest—

Look:

85 The body, just mounded over with light dust: you see?  
Not buried really, but as if they'd covered it  
Just enough for the ghost's peace. And no sign  
Of dogs or any wild animal that had been there.

And then what a scene there was! Every man of us  
Accusing the other: we all proved the other man did it;  
90 We all had proof that we could not have done it.  
We were ready to take hot iron in our hands,  
Walk through fire, swear by all the gods,  
It was not I!

I do not know who it was, but it was not I!

(Creon's rage has been mounting steadily, but the Sentry is too  
intent upon his story to notice it.)

95 And then, when this came to nothing, someone said  
A thing that silenced us and made us stare  
Down at the ground: you had to be told the news,  
And one of us had to do it! We threw the dice,  
And the bad luck fell to me. So here I am,  
100 No happier to be here than you are to have me:  
Nobody likes the man who brings bad news. **F**

Choragus. I have been wondering, King: can it be that the gods  
have done this? **G**

Creon (furiously). Stop!

Must you doddering wrecks  
105 Go out of your heads entirely? "The gods!"  
Intolerable!  
The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he served them?

**E CLASSICAL DRAMA**

Who do you think buried the body?  
Note the dramatic irony arising from  
Creon's assumption that it was a  
man.

**F CHARACTER**

Notice how the sentry, a minor  
character, relates to Creon.  
What does his attitude tell you  
about Creon?

**G CLASSICAL DRAMA**

The choragus poses a reasonable  
question. Judge Creon's response,  
noting what attitude he shows  
toward the gods.



Tried to loot their temples, burn their images,  
Yes, and the whole state, and its laws with it!  
110 Is it your senile opinion that the gods love to honor bad men?  
A pious thought!—

No, from the very beginning  
There have been those who have whispered together,  
Stiff-necked **anarchists**, putting their heads together,  
Scheming against me in alleys. These are the men,  
115 And they have bribed my own guard to do this thing.  
(*sententiously*) Money!  
There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money.  
Down go your cities,  
Homes gone, men gone, honest hearts corrupted,  
120 Crookedness of all kinds, and all for money!

(*to Sentry*) But you—!

I swear by God and by the throne of God,  
The man who has done this thing shall pay for it!  
Find that man; bring him here to me, or your death  
Will be the least of your problems: I'll string you up  
125 Alive, and there will be certain ways to make you  
Discover your employer before you die;  
And the process may teach you a lesson you seem to have missed:  
The dearest profit is sometimes all too dear.  
That depends on the source. Do you understand me?  
130 A fortune won is often misfortune.

**Sentry.** King, may I speak?

**Creon.** Your very voice distresses me.

**Sentry.** Are you sure that it is my voice, and not your conscience?

**Creon.** By God, he wants to analyze me now!

**Sentry.** It is not what I say, but what has been done, that hurts you.

135 **Creon.** You talk too much.

**Sentry.** Maybe; but I've done nothing.

**Creon.** Sold your soul for some silver: that's all you've done.

**Sentry.** How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!

**Creon.** Your figures of speech

May entertain you now; but unless you bring me the man,

140 You will get little profit from them in the end. Ⓜ

(*Exit Creon into the palace.*)

**Sentry.** "Bring me the man"—!

I'd like nothing better than bringing him the man!

But bring him or not, you have seen the last of me here.

At any rate, I am safe!

(*Exit Sentry.*)

**anarchist** (än'ər-kĭst) *n.* a person favoring the overthrow of government

**sententiously** (sĕn-tĕn'shəs-lē) *adv.* in a pompous, moralizing manner

Ⓜ **CHARACTER**  
What do you think of Creon so far?  
What seem to be his virtues?  
his flaws?



## ODE 1

**Chorus.** Numberless are the world's wonders, but none  
More wonderful than man; the storm-grey sea  
Yields to his prows; the huge crests bear him high;  
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven  
5 With shining furrows where his plows have gone  
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

The light-boned birds and beasts that cling to cover,  
The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,  
All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;  
10 The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,  
Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken  
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

Words also, and thought as rapid as air,  
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,  
15 And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,  
The spears of winter rain: from every wind  
He has made himself secure—from all but one:  
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure!  
20 O fate of man, working both good and evil!  
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!  
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?  
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,  
Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts. ■

**Ode:** a song chanted by the chorus.

◆ **GRAMMAR AND STYLE**  
Reread line 1 of the ode. Notice how the subject *wonders* comes after, rather than before, the verb *are*. Writers sometimes use **inverted sentences** like this to add variety or emphasis to their writing.

■ **READING CLASSICAL DRAMA**  
In your chart, summarize the message that this choral **ode** conveys about human beings. How would you relate the ode to the preceding scene?



## SCENE 2

(Reenter Sentry leading Antigone.)

**Choragus.** What does this mean? Surely this captive woman  
Is the princess, Antigone. Why should she be taken?

**Sentry.** Here is the one who did it! We caught her  
In the very act of burying him. Where is Creon?

5 **Choragus.** Just coming from the house.

(Enter Creon, center.)

**Creon.** What has happened?  
Why have you come back so soon?

**Sentry** (*expansively*). O King,  
A man should never be too sure of anything: **A**  
I would have sworn

That you'd not see me here again: your anger  
10 Frightened me so, and the things you threatened me with;  
But how could I tell then  
That I'd be able to solve the case so soon?

No dice throwing this time: I was only too glad to come!

Here is this woman. She is the guilty one:

15 We found her trying to bury him.

Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will.

I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

**Creon.** But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

**Sentry.** She was burying him, I tell you!

**Creon** (*severely*). Is this the truth?

20 **Sentry.** I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

**Creon.** The details: come, tell me quickly!

**Sentry.** It was like this:

After those terrible threats of yours, King,

We went back and brushed the dust away from the body.

The flesh was soft by now, and stinking,

25 So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard.

No napping this time! We kept each other awake.

But nothing happened until the white round sun

Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:

Then, suddenly,

30 A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky

Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees

### **A** CLASSICAL DRAMA

Reread line 7, and note the **dramatic irony**. How might the sentry's statement that "a man should never be too sure of anything" apply to Creon?

Martha Henry as Antigone and Philip  
Bosco as Creon in the Lincoln Center  
Repertory 1971 production







In the stinging dark. We closed our eyes and endured it.  
The whirlwind lasted a long time, but it passed;  
And then we looked, and there was Antigone!

35 I have seen  
A mother bird come back'to a stripped nest, heard  
Her crying bitterly a broken note or two  
For the young ones stolen. Just so, when this girl  
Found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted,  
40 She wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands  
That had done this thing.

And then she brought more dust  
And sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost.  
We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid,  
Not even when we charged her with what she had done.  
45 She denied nothing.

And this was a comfort to me,

And some uneasiness: for it is a good thing  
To escape from death, but it is no great pleasure  
To bring death to a friend. **B**

Yet I always say

There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!

50 **Creon** (*slowly, dangerously*). And you, Antigone,  
You with your head hanging—do you confess this thing?

**Antigone**. I do. I deny nothing.

**Creon** (*to Sentry*). You may go.

(*Exit Sentry.*)

(*to Antigone*) Tell me, tell me briefly:

Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

55 **Antigone**. It was public. Could I help hearing it?

**Creon**. And yet you dared defy the law.

**Antigone**. I dared.

It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice  
That rules the world below makes no such laws.

Your edict, King, was strong,

60 But all your strength is weakness itself against

The immortal unrecorded laws of God.

They are not merely now: they were, and shall be,  
Operative forever, beyond man utterly.

I knew I must die, even without your decree:

65 I am only mortal. And if I must die

Now, before it is my time to die,

#### **B** CLASSICAL DRAMA

In classical drama, much of the action takes place offstage and is reported by minor characters. How does the sentry's speech create sympathy for Antigone?



Surely this is no hardship: can anyone  
Living, as I live, with evil all about me,  
Think Death less than a friend? This death of mine  
Is of no importance; but if I had left my brother  
Lying in death unburied, I should have suffered.  
Now I do not. **C**

You smile at me. Ah Creon,  
Think me a fool, if you like; but it may well be  
That a fool convicts me of folly.

**Choragus.** Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to reason!  
She has never learned to yield.

**Creon.** She has much to learn.  
The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron  
Cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their necks  
At the pull of the smallest curb.

Pride? In a slave?

**This girl is guilty of a double insolence,**  
Breaking the given laws and boasting of it.  
Who is the man here,  
She or I, if this crime goes unpunished? **D**  
Sister's child, or more than sister's child,  
Or closer yet in blood—she and her sister  
Win bitter death for this!

(to servants) Go, some of you,

Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.

Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the house there.

Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark

**Cry for light, and the guardian brain shudders;**  
But how much worse than this  
Is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

**Antigone.** Creon, what more do you want than my death?

**Creon.** Nothing.

That gives me everything.

**Antigone.** Then I beg you: kill me.

**This talking is a great weariness: your words**  
Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine  
Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so:  
I should have praise and honor for what I have done.  
All these men here would praise me

**Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you.**

(bitterly) Ah the good fortune of kings,  
Licensed to say and do whatever they please! **E**

**C CHARACTER**

Reread lines 57–72. What does Antigone believe is the supreme law? What is her attitude toward death?

**insolence** (in'sə-ləns) *n.* rudeness and disrespect

**D CONFLICT**

How does Creon's perception of Antigone as a threat to his manhood heighten the conflict between them?

**E THEME**

Reread lines 99–102. What is Antigone suggesting about the rule of kings and its effect on citizens?



Creon. You are alone here in that opinion.

Antigone. No, they are with me. But they keep their tongues in leash.

05 Creon. Maybe. But you are guilty, and they are not.

Antigone. There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

Creon. But Eteocles—was he not your brother too?

Antigone. My brother too.

Creon. And you insult his memory?

Antigone (*softly*). The dead man would not say that I insult it.

110 Creon. He would: for you honor a traitor as much as him.

Antigone. His own brother, traitor or not, and equal in blood.

Creon. He made war on his country. Eteocles defended it.

Antigone. Nevertheless, there are honors due all the dead.

Creon. But not the same for the wicked as for the just.

115 Antigone. Ah Creon, Creon,

Which of us can say what the gods hold wicked? **F**

**F CLASSICAL DRAMA**

Greek tragedy explores humans' relationship to the gods. How does Antigone's thinking about the gods differ from Creon's thinking?





Creon. An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

Antigone. It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

Creon (*finally losing patience*). Go join them, then; if you must have your love,  
Find it in hell!

Choragus. But see, Ismene comes:

(*Enter Ismene, guarded.*)

Those tears are sisterly; the cloud  
That shadows her eyes rains down gentle sorrow.

Creon. You too, Ismene,

Snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood  
Stealthily—and all the time I never knew  
That these two sisters were aiming at my throne!

Do you confess your share in this crime or deny it?  
Answer me.

Ismene. Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty.



Martha Henry as Antigone and Philip Bosco as Creon in the Lincoln Center Repertory 1971 production



**Antigone** (*coldly*). No, Ismene. You have no right to say so. You would not help me, and I will not have you help me.

**Ismene**. But now I know what you meant; and I am here To join you, to take my share of punishment.

135 **Antigone**. The dead man and the gods who rule the dead Know whose act this was. Words are not friends.

**Ismene**. Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die with you: I too have a duty that I must discharge to the dead.

**Antigone**. You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

140 **Ismene**. What do I care for life when you are dead?

**Antigone**. Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his opinions.

**Ismene**. You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

**Antigone**. It's a joyless laughter, Ismene.

**Ismene**. But can I do nothing?

**Antigone**. Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you.

145 There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too.

**Ismene**. But we are equally guilty!

**Antigone**. No, more, Ismene.

You are alive, but I belong to Death. **G**

**Creon** (*to the Chorus*). Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls: One has just now lost her mind; the other,

150 It seems, has never had a mind at all.

**Ismene**. Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, King.

**Creon**. Yours certainly did, when you assumed guilt with the guilty!

**Ismene**. But how could I go on living without her?

**Creon**. You are.

She is already dead.

**Ismene**. But your own son's bride!

155 **Creon**. There are places enough for him to push his plow. I want no wicked women for my sons!

**Ismene**. O dearest Haemon, how your father wrongs you! **H**

**Creon**. I've had enough of your childish talk of marriage!

**Choragus**. Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son?

160 **Creon**. No; Death will do that for me.

**Choragus**. Then she must die?

**Creon**. You dazzle me.

—But enough of this talk!

**G CHARACTER**

What does Antigone's treatment of her sister reveal about her character?

**H CONFLICT**

Ismene reveals that Antigone is engaged to Creon's son Haemon. What new issues could arise from the conflict between Antigone and Creon?



(to guards) You, there, take them away and guard them well:  
For they are but women, and even brave men run  
When they see Death coming.

(*Exeunt* Ismene, Antigone, and guards.)

## ODE 2

**Chorus.** Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance!  
Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken  
Forever: damnation rises behind each child  
Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,  
5 When the long darkness under sea roars up  
And bursts drumming death upon the wind-whipped sand.

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past  
Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation from generation  
Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.

10 So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line  
Drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word  
And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty. 1

What mortal arrogance  
Transcends the wrath of Zeus?

15 Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long months  
Of the timeless gods: but he is young forever,  
And his house is the shining day of high Olympus.

All that is and shall be,  
And all the past, is his.

20 No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

The straying dreams of men

May bring them ghosts of joy:

But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;

Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.

25 But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:

*Fate works most for woe*

*With Folly's fairest show.*

Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow. 1

### 1 READING CLASSICAL DRAMA

Judging from this choral ode, how do the gods feel toward the family of Oedipus? Make notes in your chart.

### 1 READING CLASSICAL DRAMA

Explain the last three lines of the ode. Whom do you think these lines apply to?



## SCENE 3

**Choragus.** But here is Haemon, King, the last of all your sons.  
Is it grief for Antigone that brings him here,  
And bitterness at being robbed of his bride?

(Enter Haemon.)

**Creon.** We shall soon see, and no need of diviners.  
—Son,

5 You have heard my final judgment on that girl:  
Have you come here hating me, or have you come  
With deference and with love, whatever I do?

**Haemon.** I am your son, Father. You are my guide.  
You make things clear for me, and I obey you.

10 No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom.

**Creon.** Good. That is the way to behave: subordinate  
Everything else, my son, to your father's will.  
This is what a man prays for, that he may get  
Sons attentive and dutiful in his house,

15 Each one hating his father's enemies,  
Honoring his father's friends. But if his sons  
Fail him, if they turn out unprofitably,  
What has he fathered but trouble for himself  
And amusement for the malicious? **A**

So you are right

20 Not to lose your head over this woman.  
Your pleasure with her would soon grow cold, Haemon,  
And then you'd have a hellcat in bed and elsewhere.  
Let her find her husband in hell!

Of all the people in this city, only she  
25 Has had contempt for my law and broken it.  
Do you want me to show myself weak before the people?  
Or to break my sworn word? No, and I will not.  
The woman dies.

I suppose she'll plead "family ties." Well, let her.  
30 If I permit my own family to rebel,  
How shall I earn the world's obedience?  
Show me the man who keeps his house in hand,  
He's fit for public authority.

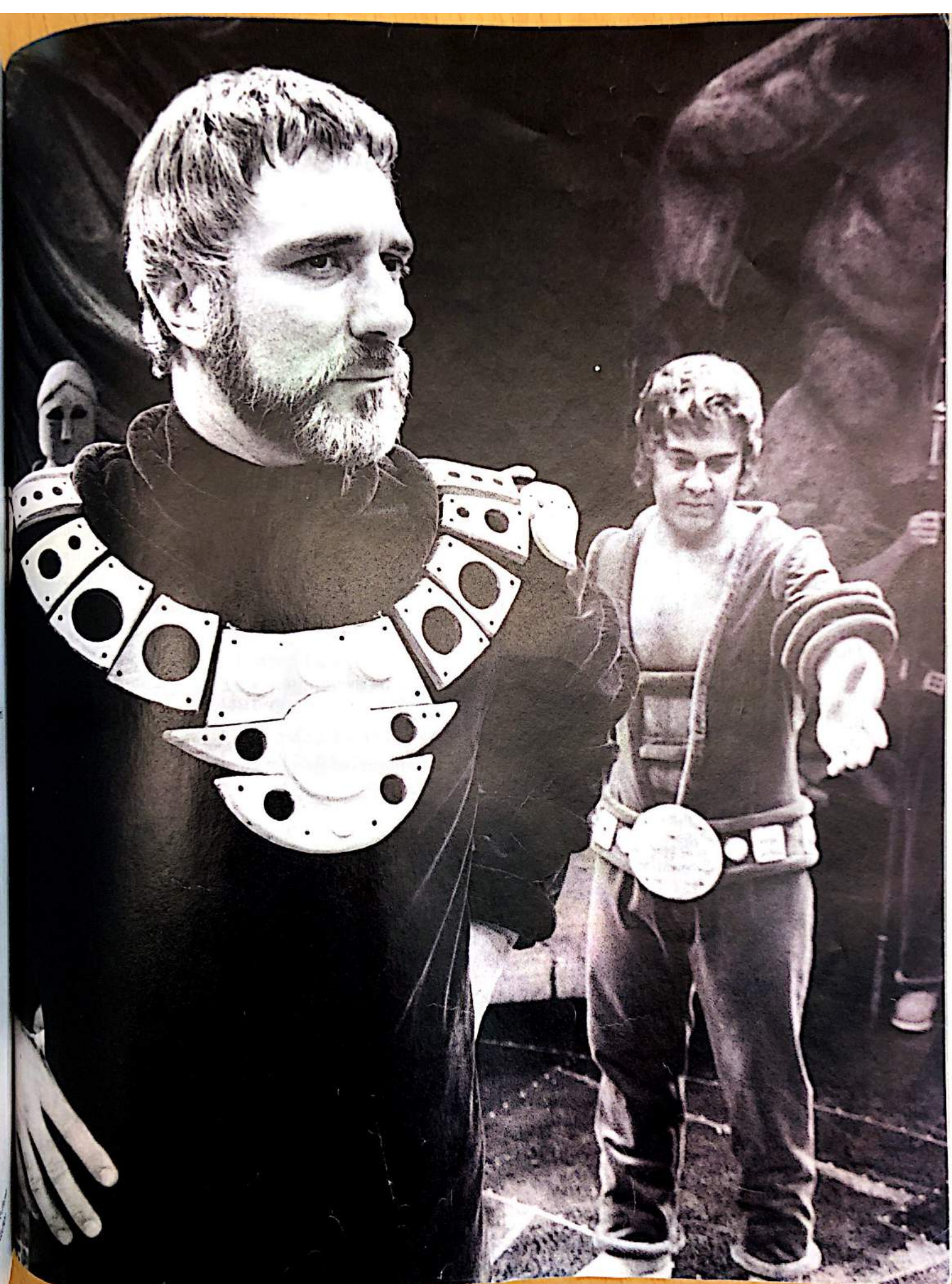
I'll have no dealings  
With lawbreakers, critics of the government:  
35 Whoever is chosen to govern should be obeyed—  
Must be obeyed, in all things, great and small,

**4 diviners** (dī-vī'nərz): those who predict the future.

**A THEME**  
Reread lines 11–19. What is Creon's view of family relationships?

Philip Bosco as Creon in the Lincoln Center Repertory 1971 production







Just and unjust! O Haemon,  
 The man who knows how to obey, and that man only,  
 Knows how to give commands when the time comes.

40 You can depend on him, no matter how fast  
 The spears come: he's a good soldier; he'll stick it out.  
 Anarchy, anarchy! Show me a greater evil!  
 This is why cities tumble and the great houses rain down;  
 This is what scatters armies! **B**

45 No, no: good lives are made so by discipline.  
 We keep the laws then, and the lawmakers,  
 And no woman shall seduce us. If we must lose,  
 Let's lose to a man, at least! Is a woman stronger than we? **C**

**Choragus.** Unless time has rusted my wits,  
 50 What you say, King, is said with point and dignity.  
**Haemon** (*boyishly earnest*). Father:  
 Reason is God's crowning gift to man, and you are right  
 To warn me against losing mine. I cannot say—  
 I hope that I shall never want to say!—that you  
 55 Have reasoned badly. Yet there are other men  
 Who can reason, too; and their opinions might be helpful.  
 You are not in a position to know everything  
 That people say or do, or what they feel:  
 Your temper terrifies them—everyone  
 60 Will tell you only what you like to hear. **D**  
 But I, at any rate, can listen; and I have heard them  
 Muttering and whispering in the dark about this girl.  
 They say no woman has ever, so unreasonably,  
 Died so shameful a death for a generous act:  
 65 "She covered her brother's body. Is this indecent?  
 She kept him from dogs and vultures. Is this a crime?  
 Death? She should have all the honor that we can give her!"  
 This is the way they talk out there in the city.  
 You must believe me:  
 70 Nothing is closer to me than your happiness.  
 What could be closer? Must not any son  
 Value his father's fortune as his father does his?  
 I beg you, do not be unchangeable:  
 Do not believe that you alone can be right.  
 75 The man who thinks that,

**B THEME**

Reread lines 35–44. What are Creon's views about government and his role as king?

**C CONFLICT**

How does Creon's perception of women contribute to his conflict with Antigone?

**D THEME**

Reread lines 55–60. How do Haemon's views of government differ from Creon's?



The man who maintains that only he has the power  
To reason correctly, the gift to speak, the soul—  
A man like that, when you know him, turns out empty.  
It is not reason never to yield to reason!

80 In flood time you can see how some trees bend,  
And because they bend, even their twigs are safe,  
While stubborn trees are torn up, roots and all.  
And the same thing happens in sailing:  
Make your sheet fast, never slacken—and over you go,  
85 Head over heels and under: and there's your voyage. **E**  
Forget you are angry! Let yourself be moved!  
I know I am young; but please let me say this:  
The ideal condition  
Would be, I admit, that men should be right by instinct;  
90 But since we are all too likely to go astray,  
The reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach.

**Choragus.** You will do well to listen to him, King,  
If what he says is sensible. And you, Haemon,  
Must listen to your father. Both speak well. **F**

95 **Creon.** You consider it right for a man of my years and experience  
To go to school to a boy?

**Haemon.** It is not right  
If I am wrong. But if I am young, and right,  
What does my age matter?

**Creon.** You think it right to stand up for an anarchist?

100 **Haemon.** Not at all. I pay no respect to criminals.

**Creon.** Then she is not a criminal?

**Haemon.** The city would deny it, to a man.

**Creon.** And the city proposes to teach me how to rule?

**Haemon.** Ah. Who is it that's talking like a boy now?

105 **Creon.** My voice is the one voice giving orders in this city!

**Haemon.** It is no city if it takes orders from one voice.

**Creon.** The state is the king!

**Haemon.** Yes, if the state is a desert. **G**

(pause)

**Creon.** This boy, it seems, has sold out to a woman.

**Haemon.** If you are a woman: my concern is only for you.

110 **Creon.** So? Your "concern"! In a public brawl with your father!

**E THEME**

Compare Haemon's words to Creon with Creon's words in Scene 2, beginning "The inflexible heart breaks first..." (line 77, page 982). What do both speeches suggest about inflexibility?

**F CLASSICAL DRAMA**

How does the choragus respond to Creon's and Haemon's arguments? How similar is your response?

**G THEME**

Interpret Haemon's reply.



**Haemon.** How about you, in a public brawl with justice?

**Creon.** With justice, when all that I do is within my rights?

**Haemon.** You have no right to trample on God's right.

**Creon** (*completely out of control*). Fool, adolescent fool! Taken in by a woman!

115 **Haemon.** You'll never see me taken in by anything vile.

**Creon.** Every word you say is for her!

**Haemon** (*quietly, darkly*). And for you.

And for me. And for the gods under the earth.

**Creon.** You'll never marry her while she lives.

**Haemon.** Then she must die. But her death will cause another.

120 **Creon.** Another?

Have you lost your senses? Is this an open threat? **H**

**Haemon.** There is no threat in speaking to emptiness.

**Creon.** I swear you'll regret this superior tone of yours!  
You are the empty one!

**Haemon.** If you were not my father,

125 I'd say you were **perverse**.

**Creon.** You girl-struck fool, don't play at words with me!

**Haemon.** I am sorry. You prefer silence.

**Creon.** Now, by God—!

I swear, by all the gods in heaven above us,

You'll watch it; I swear you shall!

(*to the servants*) Bring her out!

130 Bring the woman out! Let her die before his eyes,  
Here, this instant, with her bridegroom beside her!

**Haemon.** Not here, no; she will not die here, King.

And you will never see my face again.

Go on raving as long as you've a friend to endure you.

(*Exit Haemon.*)

135 **Choragus.** Gone, gone.

Creon, a young man in a rage is dangerous!

**Creon.** Let him do, or dream to do, more than a man can.

He shall not save these girls from death.

**Choragus.** These girls?

You have sentenced them both?

**Creon.** No, you are right.

140 I will not kill the one whose hands are clean.

**H CLASSICAL DRAMA**

Note the dramatic irony. What might Haemon mean? What does Creon think he means?

**perverse** (pər-vûrs') *adj.* willfully determined to go against what is expected or desired







## SCENE 4

**Choragus** (*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.

5 **Antigone**. Look upon me, friends, and pity me  
Turning back at the night's edge to say  
Good-bye to the sun that shines for me no longer;  
Now sleepy Death  
Summons me down to Acheron, that cold shore:

10 There is no bride song 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?

15 **Antigone**. How often I have heard the story of Niobe,  
Tantalus' 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.

**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?

25 **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,

30 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.

35 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!

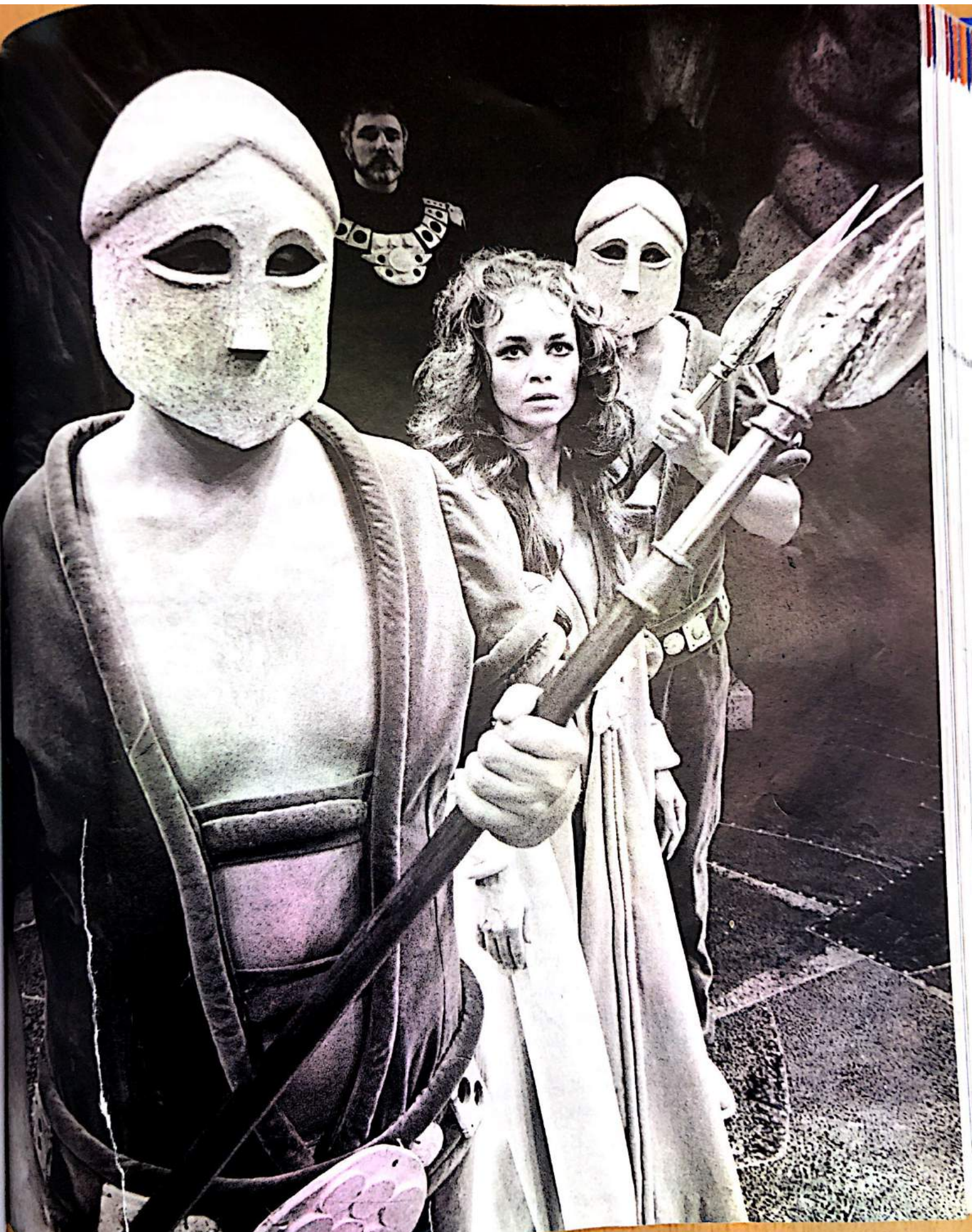
40 O Oedipus, father and brother!  
Your marriage strikes from the grave to murder mine.

**9 Acheron** (ăk'ə-rŏn'): in Greek mythology, one of the rivers bordering the underworld, the place inhabited by the souls of the dead.

**15–20 Niobe** (nī'ə-bē) was a queen of Thebes whose children were killed by the gods because she had boasted that she was greater than a goddess. After their deaths, she was turned to stone but continued to shed tears.

Martha Henry as Antigone in the  
Lincoln Center Repertory 1971  
production







I have been a stranger here in my own land:  
All my life  
The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

45 **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. **A**

**Antigone.** Then let me go, since all your words are bitter,  
50 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!

55 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  
60 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:  
65 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,  
70 May his punishment equal my own. **B**

**Choragus.** 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.

75 **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,

**44 blasphemy of my birth:** Antigone is referring to her father's marriage to his own mother, an incestuous relationship that resulted in her birth. This type of relationship was considered a sin against the gods.

**A CLASSICAL DRAMA**  
Reread lines 45–48. To what does the chorus attribute Antigone's tragic downfall?

**lamentation** (lăm'ən-tā'shən) *n.* an expression of grief

**60 Persephone** (pər-sěf'ə-nē): wife of Hades (hă'dēz) and queen of the underworld.

**B CLASSICAL DRAMA**  
How do you judge the way Antigone accepts her death? Consider whether she shows qualities of a tragic hero.



<sup>80</sup> Because I would not **transgress** the laws of heaven,  
(to the guards, simply) Come: let us wait no longer. **C**  
(Exit Antigone, left, guarded.)

## ODE 4

**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,

<sup>5</sup> 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!

<sup>10</sup> And Dryas' son also, that furious king,  
Bore the god's prisoning anger for his pride:  
Sealed up by Dionysus in deaf stone,  
His madness died among echoes.  
So at the last he learned what dreadful power

<sup>15</sup> His tongue had mocked:  
For he had profaned the revels  
And fired the wrath of the nine  
Implacable sisters that love the sound of the flute.

And old men tell a half-remembered tale  
<sup>20</sup> Of horror done where a dark ledge splits the sea  
And a double surf beats on the grey 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

<sup>25</sup> While grinning Ares 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,

<sup>30</sup> 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. **D**

**transgress** (trāns-grēs') v. to violate or break (a law, command, or moral code)

### **C** THEME

What is Antigone's highest loyalty?

**1-5** The princess Danae (dān'ə-ē') was imprisoned by her father because it had been predicted that her son would one day kill him. After Zeus visited Danae in the form of a shower of gold, she gave birth to his son Perseus, who did eventually kill his grandfather.

**10-18** King Lycurgus (lī-kūr'gēs), son of Dryas (dri'es), was driven mad and eaten by horses for objecting to the worship of Dionysus. The nine implacable sisters are the Muses, the goddesses who presided over literature, the arts, and the sciences. Once offended, they were impossible to appease.

**19-34** These lines refer to the myth of King Phineus (fīn'yōōs), who imprisoned his first wife, the daughter of the north wind, and allowed his new wife to blind his sons from his first marriage.

### **D** READING CLASSICAL DRAMA

What insights into Antigone's situation do you get from the myths that this ode alludes to? Summarize your thoughts in your chart.



## 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.

5 **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. 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.

10 **Teiresias.** Listen, Creon:

I was sitting in my chair of augury, 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

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 Hephaestus failed me: instead of bright flame,

20 There was only the sputtering slime of the fat thigh-flesh

Melting: the entrails dissolved in grey 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. **A**

O my son,

These are no trifles! Think: all men make mistakes,

But a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong,

35 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?

1–7 Teiresias is physically blind but spiritually sighted. As a prophet, he is an agent of the gods in their dealings with humans. His revelation of the truth to Oedipus had led Oedipus to leave Thebes, thus indirectly helping Creon to become king.

11–17 **chair of augury:** the place where Teiresias sits to hear the birds, whose sounds reveal the future to him. The fighting among the birds suggests that the anarchy infecting Thebes has spread even to the world of nature.

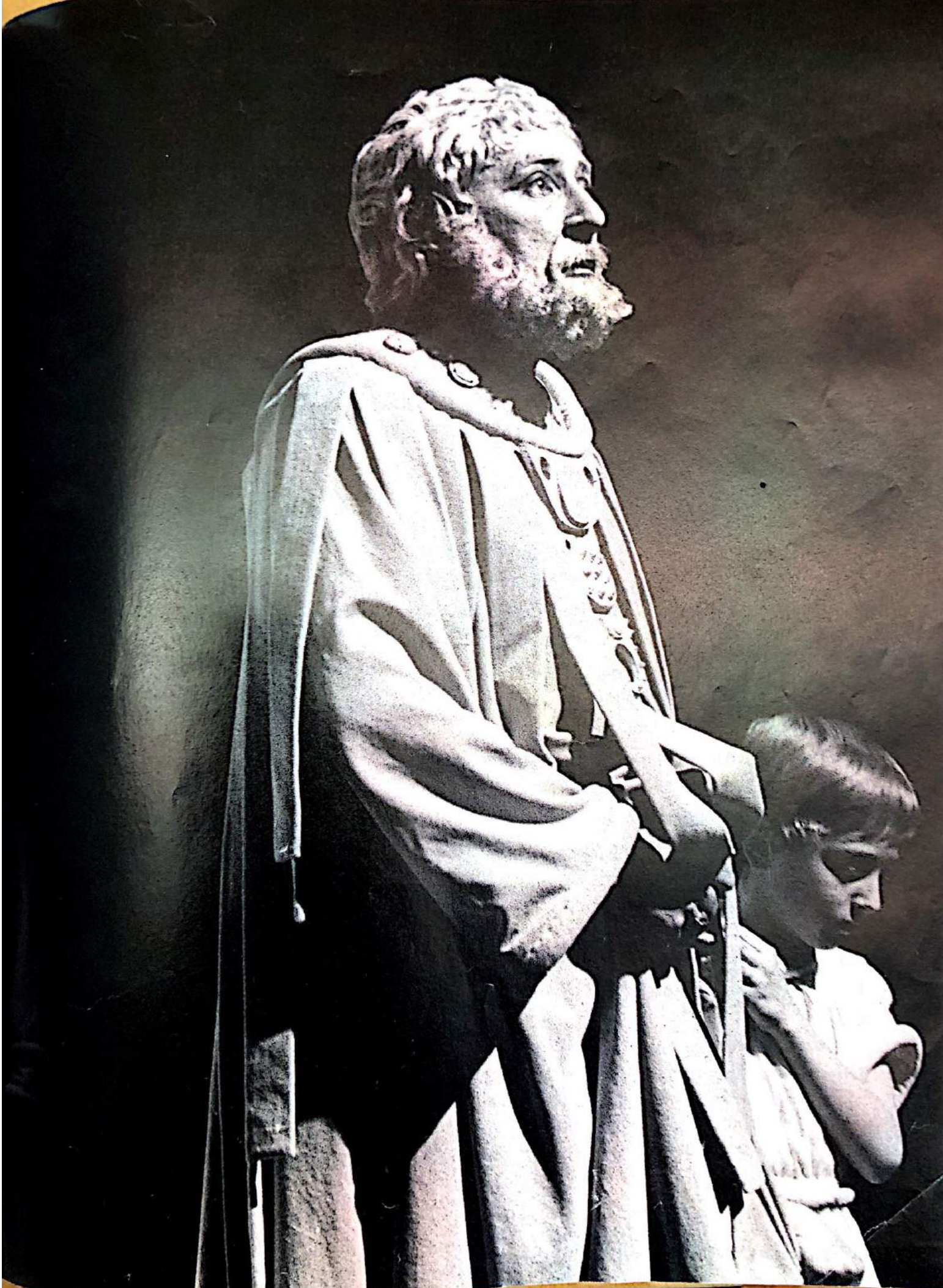
19 **Hephaestus** (hĭ-fēs'təs): the god of fire.

26–32 According to Teiresias, the birds and dogs that have eaten the corpse of Polyneices have become corrupt, causing the gods to reject the Thebans' offerings and prayers.

**A CLASSICAL DRAMA**  
Reread lines 18–32. What do they suggest about how the gods view Creon's refusal to allow Polyneices to be buried?

Sydney Walker as Teiresias in the Lincoln Center Repertory 1971 production







Think, I beg you:

It is for your own good that I speak as I do.

40 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:

45 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

50 In India gold or that synthetic gold from Sardis,

Get rich otherwise than by my consent to bury 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—

55 **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.

60 **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.

65 **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.

70 **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:

**defile** (dĭ-fīl') v. to make dirty, unclean, or impure

50 **Sardis** (sär'dĭs): the capital of ancient Lydia, where metal coins were first produced.



75 The one in a grave before her death, the other,  
Dead, denied the grave. This is your crime:  
And the Furies and the dark gods of hell  
Are swift with terrible punishment for you.  
Do you want to buy me now, Creon?

**77 Furies:** three goddesses who avenge crimes, especially those that violate family ties.

80 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.

(to boy) But come, child: lead me home.

85 Let him waste his fine anger upon younger men.  
Maybe he will learn at last  
To control a wiser tongue in a better head. **B**

(Exit Teiresias.)

**Choragus.** The old man has gone, King, but his words  
Remain to plague us. I am old, too,

90 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.

**Choragus.** Creon: take my advice.

**Creon.** What shall I do?

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

**Creon.** You would have me do this?

**Choragus.** Creon, yes!  
And it must be done at once: God moves  
Swiftly to cancel the folly of stubborn men.

100 **Creon.** It is hard to deny the heart! But I  
Will do it: I will not fight with destiny. **C**

**Choragus.** 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

105 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.)

**B CHARACTER**

What does Creon's exchange with the minor character Teiresias reveal about Creon's view of himself and others? Predict how Teiresias' prophecy might be fulfilled.

**C CHARACTER**

Why does Creon change his mind?



## PAEAN

**Choragus.** God of many names

**Chorus.** O Iacchus  
son

of Cadmean Semele  
O born of the thunder!  
guardian of the West  
regent

of Eleusis' plain  
O prince of maenad Thebes  
5 and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenus:

**Choragus.** God of many names

**Chorus.** the flame of torches  
flares on our hills

the nymphs of Iacchus  
dance at the spring of Castalia:  
from the vine-close mountain  
come ah come in ivy:

10 *Evohé evohé!* sings through the streets of Thebes

**Choragus.** God of many names

**Chorus.** Iacchus of Thebes  
heavenly child  
of Semele bride of the Thunderer!

The shadow of plague is upon us:  
come

with clement feet  
oh come from Parnassus

15 down the long slopes  
across the lamenting water

**Choragus.** 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  
20 Who cry *Io Iacche!*

*God of many names!* **D**

**Paeon** (pé'ən): a hymn that is an appeal to the gods for assistance. In this paeon, the chorus praises Dionysus, or Iacchus (yá'kəs), and calls on him to come to Thebes to show mercy and drive out evil.

**2** Cadmus was the legendary founder of Thebes. Dionysus was the son of Cadmus' daughter Semele (sə-mē'lē) and Zeus, who is referred to here as thunder.

**4–5** These lines name locations near Athens and Thebes. A **maenad** (mē'nād') was a priestess of Dionysus.

**8–9** Castalia: a spring on the sacred mountain Parnassus. Grapevines and ivy were symbols of Dionysus.

**10** *evohé* (ě-woi'): hallelujah.

**D** **READING CLASSICAL DRAMA**  
What mood is created by this paeon to the god Dionysus?



# EXODOS

(Enter Messenger.)

**Messenger.** Men of the line of Cadmus, 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,

5 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.

10 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

15 So much as the shadow of smoke for all he owns.

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

**Messenger.** They are dead. The living are guilty of their death.

**Choragus.** Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!

**Messenger.**

Haemon.

Haemon is dead; and the hand that killed him

20 Is his own hand.

**Choragus.** His father's? or his own?

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

**Choragus.** Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly you saw it all!

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

**Choragus.** But look: Eurydice, our queen:

25 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

30 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.

**Exodos:** the last episode in the play. It is followed by a final speech made by the choragus and addressed directly to the audience.

**2 Amphion** (äm-fi'an), Niobe's husband, built a wall around Thebes by charming the stones into place with music.

**27 Pallas'** (pä'l'æs): of Athena, the goddess of wisdom.

**32 Megareus** (mä-gär'yöös), the older son of Eurydice and Creon, had died in the battle for Thebes.



**Messenger.**

Dearest lady,

I will tell you plainly all that I have seen.

I shall not try to comfort you: what is the use,

35 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.

We made our prayers in that place to Hecate

40 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

45 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,

50 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!

55 Look through the crevice there, and tell me

If it is Haemon, 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

60 And hanged herself. Haemon lay beside her,

His arms about her waist, lamenting her,

His love lost underground, crying out

That his father had stolen her away from him.

When Creon saw him, the tears rushed to his eyes,

65 And he called to him: "What have you done, child? Speak to me.

What are you thinking that makes your eyes so strange?

O my son, my son, I come to you on my knees!"

But Haemon spat in his face. He said not a word,

Staring—

and suddenly drew his sword

70 And lunged. Creon shrank back; the blade missed, and the boy,

Desperate against himself, drove it half its length

Into his own side and fell. And as he died,

He gathered Antigone close in his arms again,

39–40 Hecate (hĕk'ā-tē) and Pluto: other names for Persephone and Hades, the queen and king of the underworld.

43–44 Note the contrast between the barrow, or burial mound, erected by Creon and the handful of dirt used by Antigone to cover her brother.

60 Note that this is the same way in which Jocasta, Antigone's mother, killed herself.



Choking, his blood bright red on her white cheek.  
75 And now he lies dead with the dead, and she is his  
At last, his bride in the houses of the dead. **E**

*(Exit Eurydice into the palace.)*

**Choragus.** She has left us without a word. What can this mean?

**Messenger.** It troubles me, too; yet she knows what is best;  
Her grief is too great for public lamentation,

80 And doubtless she has gone to her chamber to weep  
For her dead son, leading her maidens in his dirge.

**Choragus.** It may be so: but I fear this deep silence.

*(pause)*

**Messenger.** I will see what she is doing. I will go in.

*(Exit Messenger into the palace. Enter Creon with attendants, bearing Haemon's body.)*

**Choragus.** But here is the king himself: oh look at him,

85 Bearing his own damnation in his arms.

**Creon.** Nothing you say can touch me any more.

My own blind heart has brought me  
From darkness to final darkness. Here you see  
The father murdering, the murdered son—

90 And all my civic wisdom!

Haemon my son, so young, so young to die,  
I was the fool, not you; and you died for me.

**Choragus.** That is the truth; but you were late in learning it.

**Creon.** This truth is hard to bear. Surely a god

95 Has crushed me beneath the hugest weight of heaven,

And driven me headlong a barbaric way  
To trample out the thing I held most dear.

The pains that men will take to come to pain! **F**

*(Enter Messenger from the palace.)*

**Messenger.** The burden you carry in your hands is heavy,

100 But it is not all: you will find more in your house.

**Creon.** What burden worse than this shall I find there?

**Messenger.** The queen is dead.

**Creon.** O port of death, deaf world,  
Is there no pity for me? And you, angel of evil,

105 I was dead, and your words are death again.

Is it true, boy? Can it be true?

Is my wife dead? Has death bred death?

**Messenger.** You can see for yourself.

**E CLASSICAL DRAMA**

Summarize the tragic catastrophe that events have led to.

**F CLASSICAL DRAMA**

Reread lines 86–98. How does Creon view his actions?



*(The doors are opened, and the body of Eurydice is disclosed within.)*

**Creon.** Oh pity!

110 All true, all true, and more than I can bear!  
O my wife, my son!

**Messenger.** She stood before the altar, and her heart  
Welcomed the knife her own hand guided,  
And a great cry burst from her lips for Megareus dead,  
115 And for Haemon dead, her sons; and her last breath  
Was a curse for their father, the murderer of her sons.  
And she fell, and the dark flowed in through her closing eyes.

**Creon.** O God, I am sick with fear.  
Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow for me?

120 **Messenger.** Her curse is upon you for the deaths of both.

**Creon.** It is right that it should be. I alone am guilty.  
I know it, and I say it. Lead me in,  
Quickly, friends.  
I have neither life nor substance. Lead me in.

125 **Choragus.** You are right, if there can be right in so much wrong.  
The briefest way is best in a world of sorrow.


**Creon.** Let it come;  
Let death come quickly and be kind to me.  
I would not ever see the sun again.


130 **Choragus.** All that will come when it will; but we, meanwhile,  
Have much to do. Leave the future to itself.


**Creon.** All my heart was in that prayer!

**Choragus.** Then do not pray any more: the sky is deaf.

**Creon.** Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish.  
135 I have killed my son and my wife.  
I look for comfort; my comfort lies here dead.  
Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing.  
Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust.  
*(As Creon is being led into the house, the Choragus advances and speaks directly to the audience.)*

**Choragus.** There is no happiness where there is no wisdom;  
wisdom but in submission to the gods.  
Big words are always punished,  
And proud men in old age learn to be wise. 

 **CLASSICAL DRAMA**  
Creon assumes responsibility for  
terrible events that have occurred.  
To what extent is he a tragic hero?

 **THEME**  
What theme does the choragus  
express in the final words of the  
play?

*Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald*