



Painting on wine cup, showing the god Dionysus, the patron of theater, in his ship (540 B.C.), Exekias. Greek pottery often featured scenes from mythology. Antikensammlung, Munich, Germany. Photo Copyright © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.

Theatrical masks on a fragment of a Greek bowl, about 410 B.C. The Granger Collection, New York.



CENE 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,

4 diviners: those who predict the future.

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?

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,

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!

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?

Choragus. Unless time has rusted my wits,

11-19 What do Creon's words suggest about his relationship with his son?

26-44 What do Creon's words tell you about his views of government and his role as king?

47-48 Again Creon hints that he feels his manhood is threatened.

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
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

Will tell you only what you like to hear.

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:

"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:

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.

The man who thinks that,

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!

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,

Head over heels and under: and there's your voyage.

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;

But since we are all too likely to go astray,

The reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach.

51–60 In what ways does
Haemon's speech reflect the ideals
of democracy?

61–68 Haemon suggests that
Creon is causing the very thing he
most wants to prevent—anarchy.

79–85 Compare Haemon's words
to Creon with Creon's words to An-
tigone in Scene 2, beginning "The
inflexible heart breaks first . . ."
(line 77, page 1036).

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.

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.

(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!

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?

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,
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.

I swear, by all the gods in heaven above us,
You'll watch it; I swear you shall!

(to the servants) Bring her out!

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.)

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.

I will not kill the one whose hands are clean.

Choragus. But Antigone?

Creon (somberly).

I will carry her far away,

Out there in the wilderness, and lock her

Living in a vault of stone. She shall have food,

As the custom is, to absolve the state of her death.

And there let her pray to the gods of hell:

They are her only gods:

Perhaps they will show her an escape from death,

Or she may learn,

though late,

That piety shown the dead is pity in vain.

(Exit Creon.)

141-149 What do you make of Creon's decision to bury a person who is still alive when he has steadfastly refused to bury a dead one?

ODE 3

Chorus. Love, unconquerable

Waster of rich men, keeper

Of warm lights and all-night vigil

In the soft face of a girl:

5 Sea wanderer, forest visitor!

Even the pure immortals cannot escape you,

And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,

Trembles before your glory.

Surely you swerve upon ruin

10 The just man's consenting heart,

As here you have made bright anger

Strike between father and son—

And none has conquered but Love!

A girl's glance working the will of heaven:

15 Pleasure to her alone who mocks us,

Merciless Aphrodite.

16 Aphrodite (ăf're-dī'tē): goddess
of love and beauty.