**SCENE 1 – The royal palace in Thebes |**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | [The palace doors are thrown open and guards appear at the doors] |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER** |
|  | But here comes Creon, new king of our land, |
| 185 | son of Menoikeos. Thanks to the gods, |
|  | who’ve brought about our new good fortune. |
|  | What plan of action does he have in mind? |
|  | What’s made him hold this special meeting, |
|  | with elders summoned by a general call? |
|  | [Enter **CREON** from the palace. He addresses the assembled elders] |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Men, after much tossing of our ship of state, |
| 190 | the gods have safely set things right again. |
|  | Of all the citizens I’ve summoned you, |
|  | because I know how well you showed respect |
|  | for the eternal power of the throne, |
|  | first with Laius and again with Oedipus, |
| 195 | once he restored our city. When he died, |
|  | you stood by his children, firm in loyalty. |
|  | Now his sons have perished in a single day, |
|  | killing each other with their own two hands, |
|  | a double slaughter, stained with brother’s blood. |
| 200 | And so I have the throne, all royal power, |
|  | for I’m the one most closely linked by blood |
|  | to those who have been killed. It’s impossible |
|  | to really know a man, to know his soul, |
|  | his mind and will, before one witnesses |
| 205 | his skill in governing and making laws. |
|  | For me, a man who rules the entire state |
|  | and does not take the best advice there is, |
|  | but through fear keeps his mouth forever shut, |
|  | such a man is the very worst of men— |
| 210 | and always will be. And a man who thinks |
|  | more highly of a friend than of his country, |
|  | well, he means nothing to me. Let Zeus know, |
|  | the god who always watches everything, |
|  | I would not stay silent if I saw disaster |
| 215 | moving here against the citizens, |
|  | a threat to their security. For anyone |
|  | who acts against the state, its enemy, |
|  | I’d never make my friend. For I know well |
|  | our country is a ship which keeps us safe, |
| 220 | and only when it sails its proper course |
|  | do we make friends. These are the principles |
|  | I’ll use in order to protect our state. |

 |
|  | That’s why I’ve announced to all citizens |
|  | my orders for the sons of Oedipus— |
| 225 | Eteocles, who perished in the fight |
|  | to save our city, the best and bravest |
|  | of our spearmen, will have his burial, |
|  | with all those purifying rituals |
|  | which accompany the noblest corpses, |
| 230 | as they move below. As for his brother— |
|  | that Polyneices, who returned from exile, |
|  | eager to wipe out in all-consuming fire |
|  | his ancestral city and its native gods, |
|  | keen to seize upon his family’s blood |
| 235 | and lead men into slavery—for him, |
|  | the proclamation in the state declares |
|  | he’ll have no burial mound, no funeral rites, |
|  | and no lament. He’ll be left unburied, |
|  | his body there for birds and dogs to eat, |
| 240 | a clear reminder of his shameful fate. |
|  | That’s my decision. For I’ll never act |
|  | to respect an evil man with honors |
|  | in preference to a man who’s acted well. |
|  | Anyone who’s well disposed towards our state, |
| 245 | alive or dead, that man I will respect. |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER** |
|  | Son of Menoikeos, if that’s your will |
|  | for this city’s friends and enemies, |
|  | it seems to me you now control all laws |
|  | concerning those who’ve died and us as well— |
| 250 | the ones who are still living. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | See to it then, |
|  | and act as guardians of what’s been proclaimed. |
|  | **CHORUS** |
|  | Give that task to younger men to deal with. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | There are men assigned to oversee the corpse. |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER** |
| 255 | Then what remains that you would have us do? |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Don’t yield to those who contravene my orders |
|  |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER**No one is such a fool that he loves death. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Yes, that will be his full reward, indeed. |
|  | And yet men have often been destroyed |
| 260 | because they hoped to profit in some way. |
|  | [Enter a **Guard**, coming toward the palace] |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | My lord, I can’t say I’ve come out of breath |
|  | by running here, making my feet move fast. |
|  | Many times I stopped to think things over— |
|  | and then I’d turn around, retrace my steps. |
| 265 | My mind was saying many things to me, |
|  | “You fool, why go to where you know for sure |
|  | your punishment awaits?”—“And now, poor man, |
|  | why are you hesitating yet again? |
|  | If Creon finds this out from someone else, |
| 270 | how will you escape being hurt?” Such matters |
|  | kept my mind preoccupied. And so I went, |
|  | slowly and reluctantly, and thus made |
|  | a short road turn into a lengthy one. |
|  | But then the view that I should come to you |
| 275 | won out. If what I have to say is nothing, |
|  | I’ll say it nonetheless. For I’ve come here |
|  | clinging to the hope that I’ll not suffer |
|  | anything that’s not part of my destiny. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | What’s happening that’s made you so upset? |
|  | **Guard** |
| 280 | I want to tell you first about myself. |
|  | I did not do it. And I didn’t see |
|  | the one who did. So it would be unjust |
|  | if I should come to grief. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | You hedge so much. |
| 285 | Clearly you have news of something ominous. |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | Yes. Strange things that make me pause a lot. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Why not say it and then go—just leave. |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | All right, I’ll tell you. It’s about the corpse. |
|  | Someone has buried it and disappeared, |
| 290 | after spreading thirsty dust onto the flesh |
|  | and undertaking all appropriate rites. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | What are you saying? What man would dare this? |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | I don’t know. There was no sign of digging, |
|  | no marks of any pick axe or a mattock. |
| 295 | The ground was dry and hard and very smooth, |
|  | without a wheel track. Whoever did it |
|  | left no trace. When the first man on day watch |
|  | revealed it to us, we were all amazed. |
|  | The corpse was hidden, but not in a tomb. |
|  | It was lightly covered up with dirt, |
| 300 | as if someone wanted to avert a curse. |
|  | There was no trace of a wild animal |
|  | or dogs who’d come to rip the corpse apart. |
|  | Then the words flew round among us all, |
|  | with every guard accusing someone else. |
| 305 | We were about to fight, to come to blows— |
|  | no one was there to put a stop to it. |
|  | Every one of us was responsible, |
|  | but none of us was clearly in the wrong. |
|  | In our defense we pleaded ignorance. |
| 310 | Then we each stated we were quite prepared |
|  | to pick up red-hot iron, walk through flames, |
|  | or swear by all the gods that we’d not done it, |
|  | we’d no idea how the act was planned, |
|  | or how it had been carried out. At last, |
| 315 | when all our searching had proved useless, |
|  | one man spoke up, and his words forced us all |
|  | to drop our faces to the ground in fear. |
|  | We couldn’t see things working out for us, |
|  | whether we agreed or disagreed with him. |
| 320 | He said we must report this act to you— |
|  | we must not hide it. And his view prevailed. |
|  | I was the unlucky man who won the prize, |
|  | the luck of the draw. That’s why I’m now here, |
|  | not of my own free will or by your choice. |
| 325 | I know that—for no one likes a messenger |
|  | who comes bearing unwelcome news with him. |
|  |
|  | **CHORUS LEADER**My lord, I’ve been wondering for some time now— |
|  | could this act not be something from the gods? |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Stop now—before what you’re about to say |
| 330 | enrages me completely and reveals |
|  | that you’re not only old but stupid, too. |
|  | No one can tolerate what you’ve just said, |
|  | when you claim gods might care about this corpse. |
|  | Would they pay extraordinary honors |
| 335 | and bury as a man who’d served them well |
|  | someone who came to burn their offerings, |
|  | their pillared temples, to torch their lands |
|  | and scatter all its laws? Or do you see |
|  | gods paying respect to evil men? No, no. |
| 340 | For quite a while some people in the town |
|  | have secretly been muttering against me. |
|  | They don’t agree with what I have decreed. |
|  | They shake their heads and have not kept their necks |
|  | under my yoke, as they are duty bound to do |
| 345 | if they were men who are content with me. |
|  | I well know that these guards were led astray— |
|  | such men urged them to carry out this act |
|  | for money. To foster evil actions, |
|  | to make them commonplace among all men, |
| 350 | nothing is as powerful as money. |
|  | It destroys cities, driving men from home. |
|  | Money trains and twists the minds in worthy men, |
|  | so they then undertake disgraceful acts. |
|  | Money teaches men to live as scoundrels, |
| 355 | familiar with every profane enterprise. |
|  | But those who carry out such acts for cash |
|  | sooner or later see how for their crimes |
|  | they pay the penalty. For if great Zeus |
|  | still has my respect, then understand this— |
| 360 | I swear to you on oath—unless you find |
|  | the one whose hands really buried him, |
|  | unless you bring him here before my eyes, |
|  | then death for you will never be enough. |
|  | No, not before you’re hung up still alive |
| 365 | and you confess to this gross, violent act. |
|  | That way you’ll understand in future days, |
|  | when there’s a profit to be gained from theft, |
|  | you’ll learn that it’s not good to be in love |
|  | with every kind of monetary gain. |
| 370 | You’ll know more men are ruined than are saved |
|  | when they earn profits from dishonest schemes. |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | Do I have your permission to speak now, |
|  | or do I just turn around and go away? |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | But I find your voice so irritating— |
| 375 | don’t you realize that? |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | Where does it hurt? |
|  | Is it in your ears or in your mind? |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Why try to question where I feel my pain? |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | The man who did it—he upsets your mind. |
| 380 | I offend your ears. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | My, my, it’s clear to see |
|  | it’s natural for you to chatter on. |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | Perhaps. But I never did this. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | This and more— |
| 385 | you sold your life for silver. |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | How strange and sad |
|  | when the one who sorts this out gets it all wrong. |
|  | **CREON** |
|  | Well, enjoy your sophisticated views. |
|  | But if you don’t reveal to me who did this, |
| 395 | you’ll just confirm how much your treasonous gains |
|  | have made you suffer. |
|  | [ **CREON** back into the palace. The doors close behind him] |
|  | **Guard** |
|  | Well, I hope he’s found. |
|  | That would be best. But whether caught or not— |
|  | and that’s something sheer chance will bring about— |
| 400 | you won’t see me coming here again. |
|  | This time, against all hope and expectation, |
|  | I’m still unhurt. I owe the gods great thanks. |
|  | [Exit **Guard** away from the palace] |

**ODE 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **CHORUS** |
|  | There are many strange and wonderful things, |
|  | but nothing more strangely wonderful than man. |
| 405 | He moves across the white-capped ocean seas |
|  | blasted by winter storms, carving his way |
|  | under the surging waves engulfing him. |
|  | With his teams of horses he wears down |
|  | the unwearied and immortal earth, |
| 410 | the oldest of the gods, harassing her, |
|  | as year by year his ploughs move back and forth. |
|  | He snares the light-winged flocks of birds, |
|  | herds of wild beasts, creatures from deep seas, |
|  | trapped in the fine mesh of his hunting nets. |
| 415 | O resourceful man, whose skill can overcome |
|  | ferocious beasts roaming mountain heights. |
|  | He curbs the rough-haired horses with his bit |
|  | and tames the inexhaustible mountain bulls, |
|  | setting their savage necks beneath his yoke. |
| 420 | He’s taught himself speech and wind-swift thought, |
|  | trained his feelings for communal civic life, |
|  | learning to escape the icy shafts of frost, |
|  | volleys of pelting rain in winter storms, |
|  | the harsh life lived under the open sky. |
| 425 | That’s man—so resourceful in all he does. |
|  | There’s no event his skill cannot confront— |
|  | other than death—that alone he cannot shun, |
|  | although for many baffling sicknesses |
|  | he has discovered his own remedies. |
| 430 | The qualities of his inventive skills |
|  | bring arts beyond his dreams and lead him on, |
|  | sometimes to evil and sometimes to good. |
|  | If he treats his country’s laws with due respect |
|  | and honors justice by swearing on the gods, |
| 435 | he wins high honors in his city. |
|  | But when he grows bold and turns to evil, |
|  | then he has no city. A man like that— |
|  | let him not share my home or know my mind. |

 |