

Antigone: Tiresias' Speech

Version 1: Fitts and Fitzgerald Translation

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

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 Hephaistos ¹² failed me: instead of bright flame,

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

Melting: **the entrails dissolved in gray smoke,**

The bare bone burst from the welter. And no blaze!

This was a sign from heaven. My boy described it,

Seeing for me as I see for others.

I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought

This new calamity upon us. **Our hearths and altars**

Are stained with the corruption of dogs and carrion birds

That glut themselves on the corpse of Oedipus' son.

The gods are deaf when we pray to them, **their fire**

Recoils from our offering, their birds of omen

Have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged

With the thick blood of the dead.

O my son,

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

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

And repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man, then: do not fight with a corpse—

What glory is it to kill a man who is dead?

Think, I beg you:

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

You should be able to yield for your own good.

They were acting normal
before, then corruption
happened 785

Is more specific
about certain
gods 790

describes how the
flesh wouldn't
burn, no visible
flame 795

only mentions
Oedipus' son, not
people dead in general

800
Gives a more detailed
example of gods not wanting
offerings.

mentions just
"people" not
specifically
Creon. 805

only mentions Creon 810
in the end, and doesn't
call him by name

Agone: Tiresias' Speech

Version 2: Thomas Translation

Tiresias

You will know when you hear the omens of
my craft; for sitting on my ancient chair
of bird-watching, where in the past all the birds
have gathered for me, I heard a strange new sound—
birds, screaming with evil, barbaric frenzy;
and I knew that they were tearing at one
another with bloody talons, for the rush
of winds was clear. In fear, I went at once
to test the burnt sacrifices on the
blazing altars, but no fire was burning
on the victims. Rather, upon the embers,
a dripping ooze tickled from the thigh pieces;
it smoked and sputtered, and the bile was scattered
in the air, and the bones lay bare of the fat
that had covered them. Thus the omens failed,
there were no signs, as I learned from this boy,
for he is my guide, as I am to others.
The city is sick because of your counsel,
for our altars and all our hearths are defiled
by birds and dogs with carrion from the corpse
of the unlucky son of Oedipus.
For this reason the gods will not accept
our sacrifices, prayers, and burnt thigh-bones,
nor do the birds shriek forth clear-signaling cries,
gorged with a slain man's blood and fat. Therefore,
think on these things, my child; for every

human being makes mistakes, but when he has
made a mistake, that man is no longer
foolish and unhappy who remedies
the evil into which he has fallen
and is not stubborn. Obstinacy brings
the charge of stupidity. Yield to the dead,
don't kick a fallen man! What prowess does
it take to kill one already dead?
My counsel is good, and so is my advice.
To learn from good advice is sweetest, if
the advisor speaks to your advantage.

He is blind? He cannot birdwatch

He can tell birds are fighting just by sounds

carefully specific for a man who is blind and needs verbal accounts for things

mentions the boy, being his guide

less specific and less dramatic explanation than for others

Tiresias' crown is foolish & stubborn, though let directly.

Asks more rhetorical questions

30

35

10

15

25

gone: Tiresias' Speech

Version 3: The Braun Version

Tiresias:

Very well. Now you understand this:

Few courses of the racing sun remain
before you lose a child of your own loins
and give him back, a corpse, exchange for corpses.

You have dishonored a living soul with exile in the tomb, *Is directly speaking about Oedipus*
hurling a member of this upper world below.

You are detaining here, moreover,
a dead body, unsanctified, and so unholy,
a subject of nether gods.

The matter is out of your hands and those of the gods above. 10

A crime of violence is being done and you are commanding it. *Like both other versions, we condemn Creon for his actions*
Therefore, relentless destroyers pursue you,
Furies of death and diety;
they lie in wait for you now 15
to catch you in the midst of your crimes.

Consider that, and see if I've been bribed.

The time is near.

Weeping of women and men will be heard in your house.

All the enemy nations will be aroused,

all whose altars are stinking and corrupted *only mention of birds and dogs feasting on flesh.* 20
with the torn fragments the dogs, wild beasts, and birds bring.

You have hurt me. These facts

are the arrows that I fire into your heart,

unfailing, like a marksman.

You will not escape their pain by running. 25

Boy, lead me home

Kreon can fire on younger men.

He ought to teach his tongue silence *Doesn't try to gently convince Creon to change his actions, rather scolds him for not doing it.*
and his mind better principles.

Analyze the three translations of each speech and compare them with The Burial of Thebes by Seamus Heaney. (page numbers for Heaney's speeches are online)

Look closely at the diction, syntax, figurative language, and structure choices. What similarities exist? What differences? What is the significance of changes in meaning between the speeches? How do they reflect global issues?

While reading Tiresias's speeches, I noticed that the Fitts and Fitzgerald version and the Thomas translation had a lot in common. They both follow the same structure; Tiresias notices the birds are fighting, he is scared, goes to test the oracles, finds the offerings aren't burning, and urges Creon to change his mind and to stop being selfish and obstinate to right his wrongs. Though they are similar, they have some key differences. In the F&F translation, the gods and the animals are given more personification to give us a better image of the themes and consequences of the stories. He also describes how he witnessed a sudden change in the birds, like it wasn't that way before. The Thomas translation is strange as it describes Tiresias as a very detailed visual man, despite being blind. He is also slightly more scornful towards Creon by using more powerful language, and asking rhetorical questions. The Braun translation is the most strange one because it is entirely different. Tiresias spends the entire time angrily describing to Creon the misfortune he has wrought, and barely mentions parts of the story that the other two did. This could be much more different because this translation must've wanted to focus on Creon and the terrible things he brought over the story. It is more direct, and focuses the theme of tyranny better, though it creates less imagery.