

An analysis to the antigone chorus essay sample



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Death is a conclusion that all men must reach. It is a fate that he cannot escape and an enemy he cannot defeat. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the Chorus dedicates its first ode to man's victories and its supreme vulnerability: death. The choral ode is divided into four sections: Strophe I, Antistrophe I, Strophe II, Antistrophe II, each focusing on either man's strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, and consequences his actions yield. In Strophe II, the chorus elaborates on the triumphs man has achieved, but confesses that man has the inevitable destiny of death. In the five translations of the first choral ode composed by Fitts & Fitzgerald, Richard Emil Braun, H. D. F. Kitto, Elizabeth Wyckoff, and Paul Roche, there are nuances in such areas as format, language, and connotation in each of the translated Strophe IIs.

The formats each of the five translations vary from one another. The organization of the strophe differs visually as well conceptually. In Fitts & Fitzgerald's translation, they chose to write the strophe in six lines. The first letter of each line is capitalized, and the lines can be divided into two parts; the first set consisting of four and half lines and the second set consisting of one and a half. In the first set it states that man has learned to put his thoughts into words to good use and can protect itself from the "arrows of snow, the spears of winter train." The second set starts from the last half of the fourth line and continues on to state that man has learned to protect himself from all types of wind except "the late wind of death." In Wyckoff's translation, she chooses to convey the trials and tribulations of man in seven lines. Unlike Fitts & Fitzgerald's translation, Wyckoff's strophe is written in four sentences rather than one big sentence, and she does not separate each of the sentences into a set of lines. Instead, she ends and starts

sentences in the same line a multiple amount of times. The first sentence is completed in the middle of line four.

The second sentence starts in the middle of line four and ends in the middle of line five. The third sentence starts in the middle of line five and ends in the middle of line six. The fourth sentence starts in the middle of line six and finishes in the last line. In both Braun and Kitto's translations, the strophe is written in ten lines. Unlike Fitts & Fitzgerald and Wyckoff's translations, these translations are written in more concise and obscure lines, rather than complete thoughts. Kitto's translation consists of three sentences: one long sentence, and two short sentences. Braun translates the strophe into one long sentence. With the exception of the first line, the first letter of each line in Braun's translation starts with a lowercase letter and Kitto's starts with an uppercase letter. In Roche's translation, he writes the strophe in twelve lines. He pairs up the lines by indenting the second half of the pair. The strophe is written in two sentences, and the first letter of every other line starts with an uppercase letter. In all of the five translations, the translator first discusses the accomplishments man has made and then discusses his death at the end of the strophe. Although all five translations were derived from the same original script, the authors chose to format the strophe the way they thought would fit best.

In each of the five translations, the author chooses to use his/her own wording to project the main idea of Strophe II. In the first part of the strophe, the chorus expresses man's ability to speak and think. In Wyckoff and Braun's translations, they choose to use the word " language", whereas Roche and Fitts & Fitzgerald choose to use the word " words", and Kitto

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chooses to use the word “ speech”; all the translations used the word “ thought.” Next, the chorus sings about man’s ability to create laws. In all five translations, the words used to describe man’s ability to create laws in a different and unique way. Fitts & Fitzgerald stated this ability by saying “ statecraft is his,” implying that he creates “ the state.” Braun defines it as the ability “ to give laws to nations,” meaning that man assigns laws to countries. Kitto does not mention the ability to create laws, but rather says that man has the power “ to dwell within cities.”

Wyckoff says that man has taught himself “ the feelings that make that town.” Finally, Roche says that “ he’s civilized the world of words and wit and law.” Afterwards the chorus praises the strengths that man possess. The imagery used to describe his defeats over the forces of nature vary among the translations. Fitts & Fitzgerald and Braun both describe man’s foes as weapons. Kitto uses colorful adjectives like “ biting” and pelting” to describe the snow and the rain. Wyckoff chooses use less vivid imagery and simply states that man has learned to “ shelter against the cold, refuge from rain.” The most vibrant of the five translations, Roche writes, “ with a roof against the sky, the javelin crystal frosts the arrow-lancing rains.” Some of the diction used in the translations coincide with one another, while others have different degrees of vividness.

The combination of language and format contribute to the connotation of the translations. One part that strongly influences the connotation of the strophe is the last line. In Strophe II, the last line (or lines) discusses man’s skill to cure sickness, but his inability to escape death. The way this last part is written, however, determines whether or not man is defeated by death, or

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man is victorious over sickness. In Fitts & Fitzgerald's translation, the last part says that " he has made himself secure-from all but one: in the late wind of death he cannot stand." The last words, " he cannot stand" makes man seem weak, therefore making the strophe negative. In Braun's translations, the last part is translated as "[he] manages cures for the hardest maladies; from death alone he has secured no refuge," saying that man cannot escape death. In Kitto's translation, the strophe ends with the lines " against death alone he is left with no defence. But painful sickness he can cure by his own skill." Although the strophe has a negative connotation because it says that man is defenseless against death, the " but" immediately makes the strophe become positive and ultimately ends with one of man's victories.

In Wyckoff's translation, she sates that " there's only death that he cannot find an escape from. He has contrived refuge from illness once beyond all cure." By using the word " only," Wyckoff implies that man is invincible against all other things. It also ends the strophe like Kitto positively by stating one of man's victories. Roche ends the strophe with the lines " Provident for all, healing all disease: all but death, and death-death he never cures." The fact that he mentions the word " death" three times automatically makes it morbid. The phrase " death he never cures" makes man seem incompetent. Whether or not the strophe ends with man defeated by death, or victorious of disease can determine whether or not the strophe has a positive or negative connotation.

As there is an inequality in the number of lines Strophe II in the translations, there is also an inequality in effectiveness. It is probable that none of these

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translations can compare to the original, the one translation that is the most successful is that of H. D. F. Kitto. The concept that humanity is majestic and man is triumphant over all but death is most decently conveyed in Kitto's rendition. The ideas are complete, unlike the translations made by Braun and Roche, and his word-choice is the most comprehensible, yet decorative out of the five. Although the five translations of the first choral ode written by Fitts & Fitzgerald, Braun, Kitto, Wyckoff, and Roche are all versions of the same original piece by Sophocles, there are many disparities among them all.