

# Odes to Love and Death

ACTIVITY  
4.14

## Learning Targets

- Analyze choral odes for author's purpose, literary elements, and theme.
- Present well-reasoned ideas supported with textual evidence in discussion groups.

## Preview

In this activity, you will review the purpose of choral odes in Greek drama and analyze their function in *Antigone*.

## Analyzing Choral Odes

1. Review the Introduction to Greek Drama notes in Activity 4.7. List the various purposes of the choral odes.

2. Reflect on the first three odes that you have read previously. Complete the graphic organizer later in this activity to analyze the purpose of each ode.

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

- In this section of the play, the power of love (Eros) is juxtaposed against Antigone's impending death. As you read the following passage, mark the text for the literary elements below and annotate in the margins with inferences exploring the ancient Greeks' beliefs about love and death:
  - diction
  - allusions
  - figurative language
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meanings of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

FO  
CHORUS—Strophe

URTH DE O

### Intro to Scene

900

O Eros,<sup>1</sup> the conqueror in every fight,  
Eros, who **squanders** all men's wealth,  
who sleeps at night on girls' soft cheeks,  
and roams across the ocean seas  
and through the shepherd's hut—  
no immortal god escapes from you,  
nor any man, who lives but for a day.  
And the one whom you possess goes mad.

## LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Oral Reading, Summarize,  
Marking the Text, Graphic  
Organizer

## My Notes

**squanders:** wastes

<sup>1</sup> **Eros:** god of love and son of Aphrodite

# Odes to Love and Death

**pervverting:** corrupting



## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Word Relationships

The Choral Leader says that Antigone is “going to her bridal room” (line 912). He uses this as a **euphemism**, a word or phrase used in place of another word or phrase that is considered too harsh. In this context, the phrase *bridal room* refers to the place where Antigone is going to die. What is the effect of the Choral Leader using this euphemism?

### My Notes

## Antistrophe

### Eros and Aphrodite

Even in good men you twist their minds,  
**pervverting** them to their own ruin.  
You provoke these men to family strife.  
The bride’s desire seen glittering in her eyes—  
that conquers everything, its power  
enthroned beside eternal laws, for there  
the goddess Aphrodite works her will,  
whose ways are irresistible.

*[Antigone enters from the palace with attendants who are taking her away to her execution]*

**910** CHORAL LEADER

When I look at her I forget my place.  
I lose restraint and can’t hold back my tears—  
Antigone going to her bridal room  
where all are laid to rest in death.

### COMMOS

## ANTIGONE—Strophe 1

**920**

Look at me, my native citizens,  
as I go on my final journey,  
as I gaze upon the sunlight one last time,  
which I’ll never see again—for Hades,  
who brings all people to their final sleep,  
leads me on, while I’m still living,  
down to the shores of Acheron.<sup>2</sup>  
I’ve not yet had my bridal chant,  
nor has any wedding song been sung—  
for my marriage is to Acheron.

## CHORUS

**930**

Surely you carry fame with you and praise,  
as you move to the deep home of the dead.  
You were not stricken by lethal disease  
or paid your wages with a sword.  
No. You were in charge of your own fate.  
So of all living human beings, you alone  
make your way down to Hades still alive.

## ANTIGONE—Antistrophe 1

I’ve heard about a guest of ours,  
daughter of Tantalus,<sup>3</sup> from Phrygia—  
she went to an excruciating death  
in Sipylus,<sup>4</sup> right on the mountain peak.  
The stone there, just like clinging ivy,  
wore her down, and now, so people say,  
the snow and rain never leave her there,

<sup>2</sup> **Acheron:** a river in Hades across which the dead were ferried

<sup>3</sup> **Tantalus:** son of Zeus who was punished by being “tantalized” by food and drink that were always just out of his reach

<sup>4</sup> **Sipylus:** mountain ruled by Tantalus; location of the weeping stone formation of Niobe

940

CHORUS

as she laments. Below her weeping eyes  
her neck is wet with tears. God brings me  
to a final rest which most resembles hers.

But Niobe<sup>5</sup> was a goddess, born divine—  
and we are human beings, a race which dies.  
But still, it's a fine thing for a woman,  
once she's dead, to have it said she shared,  
in life and death, the fate of demi-gods.

ANTIGONE—**Strophe 2**

**Tantalus**

950

Oh, you are mocking me! Why me—  
by our fathers' gods—why do you all,  
my own city and the richest men of Thebes,  
insult me now right to my face,  
without waiting for my death?  
Well at least I have Dirce's springs,  
the holy grounds of Thebes,  
a city full of splendid chariots,  
to witness how no friends lament for me  
as I move on—you see the laws  
which lead me to my rock-bound prison,  
a tomb made just for me. Alas!  
In my wretchedness I have no home,  
not with human beings or corpses,  
not with the living or the dead.

960

CHORUS

You pushed your daring to the limit, my child,  
and tripped against Justice's high altar—  
perhaps your agonies are paying back.  
some compensation for your father.

ANTIGONE—**Antistrophe 2**

970

**The Cause of  
Antigone's Fate**

Now there you touch on my most painful thought—  
my father's destiny—always on my mind,  
along with that whole fate which sticks to us,  
the splendid house of Labdakos—the curse  
arising from a mother's marriage bed,  
when she had sex with her own son, my father.  
From what kind of parents was I born,  
their wretched daughter? I go to them,  
unmarried and accursed, an outcast.  
Alas, too, for my brother Polyneices,  
who made a fatal marriage and then died—  
and with that death killed me while still alive.

CHORUS

inco

980

To be piously **devout** shows reverence,  
but powerful men, who in their persons  
rporate authority, cannot bear  
anyone to break their rules. Hence, you die  
because of your own selfish will.

<sup>5</sup> **Niobe:** daughter of Tantalus; all her children were killed and she was turned to stone; her rock formation appears to weep tears for her children as it rains

### My Notes

**devout:** religious

# Odes to Love and Death

**epode:** final stanza of the ode; follows the strophe and antistrophe

## My Notes

**libations:** liquid gifts to a god

ANTIGONE—**Epode**

Without lament, without a friend,  
and with no marriage song, I'm being led  
in this miserable state, along my final road.  
So wretched that I no longer have the right  
to look upon the sun, that sacred eye.  
But my fate prompts no tears, and no  
friend mourns.

CREON

990

**Creon's Entrance**  
**Antigone's Lament**

Don't you know that no one faced with death  
would ever stop the singing and the groans,  
if that would help? Take her and shut her up,  
as I have ordered, in her tomb's embrace.  
And get it done as quickly as you can.  
Then leave her there alone, all by herself—  
she can sort out whether she wants suicide  
or remains alive, buried in a place like that.  
As far as she's concerned, we bear no guilt.  
But she's lost her place living here with us.

ANTIGONE

1000

Oh my tomb and bridal chamber—  
my eternal hollow dwelling place,  
where I go to join my people. Most of them  
have perished—Persephone<sup>6</sup> has welcomed them  
among the dead. I'm the last one, dying here  
the most evil death by far, as I move down  
before the time allotted for my life is done.  
But I go nourishing the vital hope  
my father will be pleased to see me come,  
and you, too, my mother, will welcome me,  
as well as you, my own dear brother.  
When you died, with my own hands I washed you.  
I arranged your corpse and at the grave mound  
poured out **libations**. But now, Polyneices,  
this is my reward for covering your corpse.  
However, for wise people I was right  
to honour you. I'd never have done it  
for children of my own, not as their mother,  
nor for a dead husband lying in decay—  
no, not in defiance of the citizens.  
What law do I appeal to, claiming this?  
If my husband died, there'd be another one,  
and if I were to lose a child of mine  
I'd have another with some other man.  
But since my father and my mother, too,  
are hidden away in Hades' house,  
I'll never have another living brother.  
That was the law I used to honour you.  
But Creon thought that I was in the wrong

1010

1020

<sup>6</sup> **Persephone:** goddess of the underworld; she was abducted by Hades and forced to spend one third of each year there, which is the winter during which nothing blooms or grows

1030

and acting recklessly for you, my brother.  
Now he seizes me by force and leads me here—  
no wedding and no bridal song, no share  
in married life or raising children.  
Instead I go in sorrow to my grave,  
without my friends, to die while still alive.  
What holy justice have I violated?  
In my wretchedness, why should I still look  
up to the gods? Which one can I invoke  
to bring me help, when for my reverence  
they charge me with impiety? Well, then,  
if this is something fine among the gods,  
I'll come to recognize that I've done wrong.  
But if these people here are being unjust  
may they endure no greater punishment  
than the injustices they're doing to me.

1040

CHORUS LEADER

The same storm blasts continue to attack  
the mind in this young girl.

CREON

Then those escorting her  
will be sorry they're so slow.

ANTIGONE

Alas, then,  
those words mean death is very near at hand.

CREON

I won't encourage you or cheer you up,  
by saying the sentence won't be carried out.

ANTIGONE

1050

### Contrasting Characters

O city of my fathers  
in this land of Thebes—  
and my ancestral gods,  
I am being led away.  
No more delaying for me.  
Look on me, you lords of Thebes,  
the last survivor of your royal house,  
see what I have to undergo,  
the kind of men who do this to me,  
for paying **reverence** to true piety.

[Antigone is led away under escort]

FIFTH

ODE

CHORUS—Strophe 1

1060

In her brass-bound room fair Danae<sup>7</sup> as well  
endured her separation from the heaven's light,  
a prisoner hidden in a chamber like a tomb,  
although she, too, came from a noble line.  
And she, my child, had in her care  
the liquid streaming golden seed of Zeus.

### My Notes

**reverence:** respect or honor

<sup>7</sup> **Danae:** daughter of a king; Zeus fell in love with her and they had a son, Perseus

# Odes to Love and Death

## My Notes

### Antistrophe 1

1070

But the power of fate is full of mystery.  
There's no evading it, no, not with wealth,  
or war, or walls, or black sea-beaten ships.  
And the hot-tempered child of Dryas,<sup>8</sup>  
king of the Edonians, was put in prison,  
closed up in the rocks by Dionysus,<sup>9</sup>  
for his angry mocking of the god.

There the dreadful flower of his rage  
slowly withered, and he came to know  
the god who in his frenzy he had mocked  
with his own tongue. For he had tried  
to hold in check women in that frenzy  
inspired by the god, the Bacchanalian fire.  
More than that—he'd made the Muses angry,  
challenging the gods who love the flute.

1080 Strophe 2

Beside the black rocks where the twin seas meet,  
by Thracian Salmydessos at the Bosphorus,  
close to the place where Ares dwells,  
the war god witnessed the unholy wounds  
which blinded the two sons of Phineus,<sup>10</sup>  
inflicted by his savage wife—the sightless holes  
cried out for someone to avenge those blows  
made with her sharpened comb in blood-stained  
hands.

### Antistrophe 2

1090

In their misery they wept, lamenting  
their wretched suffering, sons of a mother  
whose marriage had gone wrong. And yet,  
she was an offspring of an ancient family,  
the race of Erechtheus, raised far away,  
in caves surrounded by her father's winds,  
Boreas' child, a girl who raced with horses  
across steep hills—child of the gods.  
But she, too, my child, suffered much  
from the immortal Fates.

<sup>8</sup> **child of Dryas:** Dryas' son, who objected to the worship of Dionysus, was imprisoned and driven mad; later he was blinded by Zeus as additional punishment.

<sup>9</sup> **Dionysus:** Greek god of wine and son of Zeus

<sup>10</sup> **Phineus:** King of Thrace, who imprisoned his first wife Cleopatra; his new wife blinded Cleopatra's two sons out of jealousy.

## Second Read

- Reread the scene to answer these text-dependent questions.
  - Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
3. **Key Ideas and Details:** Reread lines 915–960. How does Antigone think the public views her fate? Why does she have this impression? Is it accurate? Back up your answers with textual evidence.
  4. **Key Ideas and Details:** Reread lines 1010–1025. What justification does Antigone give for burying Polyneices even though she says she would not have done it for other members of her family?
  5. **Key Ideas and Details:** A martyr is someone who willingly suffers or dies rather than give up his or her cause or beliefs. Do you think that Antigone goes to her death as a martyr? Support your claims with textual evidence.
  6. **Key Ideas and Details:** How do Creon and Antigone ultimately see themselves and their roles in this scene? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

## My Notes

[illegible]

# Odes to Love and Death

## My Notes

7. **Craft and Structure:** Several times in the scene, Antigone’s tomb is referred to as her bridal chamber. How does this affect the mood of the audience or reader?

8. **Craft and Structure:** In lines 1072–1073, what does the Chorus mean by “the dreadful flower of his rage slowly withered”?

9. **Key Ideas and Details:** How do gods and fate play a role in this scene?

## Working from the Text

10. After reading the fourth and fifth odes, refer to the following graphic organizer to analyze the purpose of each ode.

11. Use the following questions to guide a group discussion of the ideas in this passage. Provide textual support for your opinions.

- What attitudes and ideas about love and death are conveyed in this scene?
- How are these ideas similar to or different from your culture’s attitude toward love or death?
- How do the different characters and their interactions help develop themes related to love and death?