

Iphigenia and antigone: women of honor

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Women of Sacrifice and Honor

Everyone possesses courage but keeping one's bravery when facing death uses an immense amount of bravery. Two women who are sentenced to die, Iphigenia and Antigone, employ this bravery in their individual sacrifices.

Iphigenia and Antigone are heroines in their respective dramas because they showed courage in the face of despair, for even when condemned to die they embraced their destinies. While the Iphigenia's and Antigone's sacrifices are similar in the way that male familial authority condemned them, they differ in intention. Iphigenia submissively sacrifices her life for her people and for her father's honor while Antigone rebelliously sacrifices for her brother's and her honor; therefore both women die honorably.

Iphigenia is a perfect example of a submissive female who dies for her father and for her people without questioning authority; however, a hidden strength lies in her actions. Agamemnon is in a bind when he is forced to choose between his daughter or his troops; for he must choose between killing his daughter to appease Artemis and sail to Ilion, but if he fails to do so, he will risk his soldiers' mutinous wrath. Iphigenia realizes his dilemma and knows that the only way to ensure her father's survival is to sacrifice herself. Her love for her father, despite his cowardice in allowing her to take the fall for him, provides her with the motivation to die. However, Iphigenia shows her sacrifice for her people on a much grander scale than Antigone's, for it takes the form of Greek victory against the Trojans when she declares, "I give my life to Greece. / Take me, kill me, / and bring down Troy. That will be my monument / for ages to come. That will be my wedding, / my children, the meaning of my life" (Euripides 1886-90). Iphigenia selflessly sacrifices not

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only herself, but also her dreams, future, and hopes in the form of marriage and having children, and she performs this sacrifice all for her people and the greek cause. However, the manner in which Iphigenia goes about sacrificing herself is passive and subservient, for aside from initial hesitance at being sacrificed, she fulfills her role as a princess devoted to her duty to her people and king. Nevertheless, what Iphigenia draws from her morals is her selflessness, which transforms her from the unwitting sacrifice to the voluntary one, transcending the world around her by choice. However, Antigone drastically differs from Iphigenia in her motive for sacrifice.

Although Antigone is set to die because of the familial authority of her uncle, her sacrifices for herself and for her brother are both acts of defiance against Creon, which shows that Antigone stays true to herself until the end. By burying Polynices, Antigone cements her fate but, in no way, does she show that she regrets her actions, for she remarks, “ Ashamed? Ashamed of loving my own brother? / ... / I was born to love, not hate, my brothers.” (Sophocles 488, 500). while fully understanding the consequences, she protects her brother’s honor because she loves him and because of this she dies for her brother; however, Sophocles also shows that Antigone’s death was a matter of self-sacrifice as well. Ismene, Haemon, and Creon beg Antigone not to waste her life and to marry Haemon, but Antigone is adamant about staying true to her morals, so she declines. When Ismene is unable to understand Antigone stubbornly continuing to defy authority, Antigone responds by stating her loyalty to her family, to the gods, and to herself when she says, “ I shall bury him [Polynices]- / And if I die for it, death will be sweet: / Convicted of reverence I shall lie / Forever beside the brother who loves

me, / The brother I love” (Sophocles 68-73). As compared to Ismene, Antigone declared her steadfast devotion to her family, self, and gods when justifying her fate, when Ismene could not. Antigone’s most defining feature is staying true to herself which Ismene notes. Regardless of the motivation behind her sacrifice, it was a conscious decision on Antigone’s part to face the consequences of death, which is shown when she addresses Ismene, “ You chose to live; it was I who chose to die” (Sophocles 533). Antigone stands up to authority in the form of self-sacrifice and through her words, Antigone articulates that her will and individuality remain even as she is sentenced to die by Creon and in that way she sacrifices for herself as well as for her brother. While Antigone and Iphigenia may have gone about justifying their deaths for different reasons, what binds them in similarity is for whom they both sacrificed themselves.

The main similarity between Iphigenia and Antigone is that they are condemned to death by a male relative’s patriarchal authority, but both women sacrifice themselves willingly for loved ones. Agamemnon’s and Creon’s decision to kill the respective heroines renders the women helpless, which shows how women submit to patriarchal authority in ancient Greece. Agamemnon is intimidated by the threat of mutiny within his army into offering his daughter, Iphigenia up for sacrifice when he accidentally offends Artemis by killing a deer. Creon himself decides to kill Antigone when she disobeys his orders not to give Polynices a burial, yet when he changes his mind, he is unable to retract her death sentence, his own authority being too powerful. The injustice of the girls’ faith is pronounced when, at the prelude to her end, Antigone cries, “ It was for this / Last service to Polynices my

brother / That I am thus rewarded – a service / Of honour that all right-thinking men approve” (Sophocles 892-95). This shows how the simple act of going against a man’s order, even in pious actions, can bring death to women. The two women, subject to their father figure’s incompetency, take matters into their own hands. While Iphigenia and Antigone do perish, they die on their own terms. Iphigenia rises to death for her father and people, the ones she loves; whereas, Antigone sacrifices herself to maintain the honor of those she loves, her brother and herself. Iphigenia and Antigone though doomed by patriarchal authority die honorably as a sacrifice for their loved ones.

Iphigenia and Antigone are women of honor. They are women who die for the people they care about while staying true to the morals that drive them. Both were struck against a tragic fate by familial patriarchal authority, yet each woman in her own way embraces death as an act of honor. Iphigenia dies for her people, and Antigone dies for her brother, but both women choose to die herself. This selflessness and humility brands one as an honorable hero, of which Iphigenia and Antigone are no less of. Heroes can be found in one’s everyday life if only one would take the initiative to find it within themselves to be an honorable person.