

Pride, gender, and inaction in Antigone



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The central theme of Sophocles play "Antigone" is the dilemma that one faces, in adhering to ones own conclusion or to abide by the existing laws of the land. The play highlights the fact that men have been bestowed with independent thinking, and have been blessed with the capacity to analyze situations; Man must therefore consult his mental faculties and think rationally before making a judgment. Therefore, the four major themes of the play Antigone are Pride, Gender, Individual versus State; Conscience versus Law; Divine Law versus Human Law, and Inaction.

There is no question that pride, in Antigone, is a trait loathed by the gods, one that is punishable without mercy. Sophocles describes the type of pride that allows men to create laws that substitute for divine principles. When Creon creates a law because he believes it is divine will, it is the ultimate display of punishable pride, for no man can ever form a law that is equivalent to or greater than divine right. Consequently, when Tiresias comes with the news that Creon will be punished, Creon realizes that he has made an awful mistake, and yet still refuses to admit it. Creon bends to the prophet's message only because he wants to save his life, not because he knows he's gone too far. As a result, Creon must suffer the loss of his family.

Individual versus State, Conscience versus Law, and Divine Law versus Human Law are three major conflicts in Antigone that are closely intertwined. Antigone and her principles pair with the first entity in each conflict, while Creon and his standards line up with the second. Antigone is a risk to the status quo; she invokes divine law as justification for her actions,

but is implicit in her position on faith. She sacrifices her life out of devotion to principles higher than human law. Creon's position is an understandable one, for example, in the stir of war, and with his reign so new, Creon has to set an example by showing his citizens that his power is supreme. On the other hand, Creon's need to triumph over Antigone seems to be tremendously personal. The order of the state is not only at stake after Creon's mistake, his sense of self as king is also in peril after his detrimental mistake.

Antigone's sex has profound effects on the significance of her actions. Creon himself says that the need to conquer her is vital because she is a woman. By refusing to be submissive, Antigone defies one of the basic rules of her society. Ismene is Antigone's foil because she is intimidated by the rule of men, she believes that women should be subservient to men. Ismene says that men are stronger, and for that reason must be obeyed. In due course, we see that she has naively bought into the problematic concepts that Creon adopted. When Creon realizes he may be incorrect, he changes his argument, he claims that if he was wrong, he couldn't confess that he was beat by a woman, for that would upset divine law more than reneging on his principles would. It is this original fabrication that Sophocles' play seeks to correct, primarily through the retribution the Gods inflict on Creon as a result of his insensitive and sexist thinking.

When faced with prejudice, Antigone and Ismene react quite differently. Ismene is not so much frightened of injustice as she is terrified of her own downfall, she cannot bear to incur the fury of men for fear of being damned to the same fate as the rest of her family. After witnessing her father and

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brothers death, she thinks that the best course of action is to obey. In the case of Ismene, it seems inaction is unified with fear, she then willingly offers to die next to Antigone, at which point we recognize that she is not so much inactive as she is uncertain of her position as a woman. Accordingly, while Ismene is characterized primarily by doubt, Antigone is one who plunges ahead purely on self-confidence and her firm convictions about right and wrong. In the end, it's because of these fundamental differences in philosophy that they cannot die as one.

In the end, it is apparent that Antigone has received the best reward. Upon her death, she is reunited with her loved ones, her mother, her father, her brothers and even her affianced, Haemon. The fact that Haemon takes his life after Antigone's death solidifies the idea that the gods truly are rewarding Antigone. While her family members are already present in the afterlife, her death robbed her of her adored spouse to be and " Denied [her] part in the wedding songs..." but this rejection is undone upon the death of Haemon. Creon and Ismene, with their narcissistic intentions, are both left alone and are eventually punished for their self-serving actions. While both Creon and Ismene experience the loss of family and must live out their lives in isolation, Creon's punishment is fueled by the fact that his community loses admiration for him and soon after, his empire is taken over by a second war, leaving his life in complete ruin.

Works Cited

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