

Assessor essays examples

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World Literature

‘ Antigone’ by Sophocles:

Analyzing the importance of Teiresias in Greek tragedy

Greek Literature speaks of ‘ Antigone’ as the tragic play, which was written by Sophocles during 441 B. C. Some of the literary experts are of the view that the original manuscript belonged to years much before 441 B. C.; however, the lack of evidence certifying the earlier dates suggest the former as the age of this storyline (Leach).

This play is an important asset that World Literature preserves with care, and serves as the source for many important inferences that can be drawn from each event that takes place in the play. It talks about the anarchy that prevailed during the time in Greece, the lust for power that emerged as the fierce battle between two brothers, religious fears, traditional practices and deterioration of a nation under the rule of a tyrant. The play has a prominent appeal, especially without any political propaganda and succeeds in keeping off from any controversies that could arise as a result of its depiction (Leach,

Sophocles).

It is important to describe the essence of ‘Antigone’ in brief, as the basis of analyzing Teiresias character in the most popular drama of the time.

‘Antigone’ in brief

Thebes’ civil war in Athens features two royal brothers Eteocles and Polyneices battling against each other. Both the brothers die, and the kingdom is in the state of anarchy, in desperate need of a commander to rule Athens (Sophocles and Griffith). Creon is crowned as the king, who decides to honour Eteocles and humiliate Polyneices after his death, in the worst manner imaginable during those times. He passes an order to have Polyneices dead body remain unburied, to fend to animals and vultures as the punishment (Sophocles and Griffith).

Antigone, one of the two sisters of Eteocles and Polyneices decides to perform the burial of her brother’s body herself, for which she seeks help from Ismene, the other sister. Ismene refuses to support Antigone, and is disowned by her for the act. Antigone attempts to perform the burial herself, but is caught by Creon’s guards. Antigone is arrested and Ismene is summoned in suspicion of the contempt of royal order, when Ismene owns the crime of burial to get hanged alongside her sister. Antigone denies any involvement of Ismene though. Confusion persists and both the sisters are temporarily imprisoned.

Creon’s son Haemon is engaged to Antigone, and pursues his father to reconsider the punishment. He initially appears to forsake Antigone, but later stands by her, which results in a fierce argument between father and son. At this stage enters Teiresias, a blind prophet who has the power to look deep

inside the truth, and can depict future. Teiresias warns Creon against his act and ask him to perform the burial ceremony for Polyneices as he deserved, in lieu of which he may lose his son. Creon disregards the blind prophet's advice and considers him another ploy in the plot against himself involving Antigone, Ismene and Haemon. However, the whole of Athens turn rebel gradually, and Creon is forced to succumb to Teiresias's suggestion. Just as he is done with the burial, he gets the news that his only son Haemon stabbed himself to death, after Antigone hung herself. Creon is shaken and is apparently heart-broken when news of his wife's suicide reaches him, just after Haemon's news of death. The play is concluded with a king who is completely distraught of his own erroneous acts, finally left alone without a family.

Significance of Teiresias' character as a protagonist

Sophocles portrays Teiresias as the only strongest character in the entire play, which is wise and courageous enough to keep his stand against Creon till the end (Leach). He is very wise, full of reason and can 'see' the truth despite his physical blindness. He is presented much powerful than Creon who cannot differentiate between the justified and unjustified, in-spite of assuming full powers in his hands (Shmoop). Teiresias' character emerges as the one who holds powers to look into future.

In the play, Teirisias makes an entry as a cranky old man, but gradually emerges as the powerful character that can tune his mind with Apollo and receives visions of future (Shmoop). He is annoyed when the people around him are doomed to shame, humiliation and death, and his prophecies to warn the humans are rejected as senseless. He is himself arrested for being

the traitor by Creon, but refuses to give in.

The voice of Teiresias echoes the voice of Antigone in the play (Shmoop), as he turns rebellious against the king and accuses him of angering the Greek Gods. His arguments seem irrational and he appears to be a crazy old prophet, with incredibly rationalized knowledge that he possesses.

Conclusion

The role of Teiresias is very significant in bringing out the real essence of the play that Gods of Heaven can bring mourn and disaster if the Gods on earth decide to play against them. Teiresias exhibits the crankiness of an old fellow, wisdom of a saint, courage of a true rebel, convincing power of a prophet and finally the rationalized mind of someone who is more knowledgeable than a mere human. Through this character, Sophocles has succeeded in concluding that the wishes of Gods must never be opposed.

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