

# Antigone's tragedy described by sophocles

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Antigone is one of the most popular examples of Greek tragedy that survives today. It was written by the Greek playwright Sophocles who was born near Athens in 496 BC. He was one of the most celebrated plays writes in Athens and one of his most celebrated works was the tragic play Antigone.

According to Aristotle the main aim of Greek tragedy is to bring a 'catharsis' out of the spectators in order to make them feel pity and fear so that they could leave the theatre feeling both cleansed and uplifted emotionally, with a heightened understanding of Gods and men. This catharsis is brought about by witnessing some disastrous and moving change in the fortunes of drama. This is clearly evident in the play Antigone which is a great Greek tragedy by Sophocles.

The story is about a young woman who has buried her brother by breaking the king's decree, and now she is punished for obeying God's law. There are many arguments about who is the tragic hero in Sophocles' Antigone. Some believe that it is Creon because he also has the characteristics of a tragic hero. Others believe that it is Antigone because she has the good and pure intention of burying her brother. Creon is the king of Thebes and is a complete autocrat. He is a leader who identifies the power and destiny of the state entirely with himself. This is proven when Creon states 'the city is the kings and that is the law'. This quote reflects Creon's tyrannical attitude to kingship and his narrow-minded nature to not realize what the people want, as at the time Greece was a democratic country. I believe that Creon being in power leads to the assumption that everything is within his power.

In Creon's case, he states that 'never if I can help it shall evil triumph over good'. Perhaps Creon's position as king skewed his perception of what is just. This is evident on several occasions during the course of the play. This is first evident in the contention between Creon and his son Haemon. Initially when Creon questions him about his loyalties Haemon replies that no woman is as important as his father. Pleased Creon praises his son's wisdom. However, he then angers his father when he mentions that he overheard people saying Antigone doesn't deserve such a punishment for her righteous seeming dead. He then implores his father to reconsider his edict. Creon, however, cannot take advice from his son. He replies to this by saying 'accept your father's words as law in all things'. This is proof of Creon's tragic flaw hubris which is the origin of his downfall. Creon refuses to listen to what his son has to say, to the point where you could argue that Creon cannot bring himself to acknowledge that he could ever be wrong. Additionally, this points out Creon's tyrannical attitude to kingship as he is unable to head what the people and goes against the democracy of Thebes. Sophocles may have implemented this scene for the audience to agree with Haemon's argument against Creon's tyranny as this would have appealed to the democratic audience of Athens.

However, Tiresias eventually helps Creon realize how bad his dealing with his problems, this is evident when Creon says 'It is hard giving up the hearts desires... But I will do it no more fighting a losing battle.' This is Creon's moment of anagnorisis in which Creon finally heeds Tiresias's prophecy and sets of to free Antigone. However, Creon then faces a moment of peripeteia in which he finds Antigone already dead in the cave. This angers Haemon

and he blames the death of Antigone on his father, at which point he to take a wild swing at his father Creon and then decides to kill himself. This triggers Creon to realize how badly his hubris has interfered with dealing with his problems and says 'so senseless, so insane... my crimes'. Not long after he finds out Eurydice has also died. In which Creon confesses and says 'I admit it all!' Sophocles intends for the audience to feel a sense of catharsis towards Creon in order to present him as a tragic character since the aim is to arouse pity throughout the altercation in the status of a character.

Antigone is a very strong and resolute character which would have been very unorthodox at the time for a woman. She juxtaposes her sister Ismene, who is very docile and much more reserved. As in ancient Greek times, women were expected to be conservative and obedient to their husbands. It could be argued that Antigone's and her high moral ground is her hamartia which leads to her tragic downfall. This is evident in a few key scenes his lead up to her tragic suicide. The first scene in which Sophocles makes evident of Antigone's single-minded and ambitious nature is when she approaches her sister Ismene who kindly rejects her proposal and warns her of the consequences of defying Creon's edict, In rejecting Ismene's passive obedience to the state. Antigone responds 'he has no right to keep me from my own'. This highlights the fact that like Creon Antigone is unable to head the advice of others, and her audacious and ambitious nature obscures her sense of judgment. This is made further evident when Ismene tells Antigone not to discuss her plan with anyone else. Antigone dismisses this suggestion and states 'shout it from the rooftops'. This is proof of Antigones disregard for her own life as she glorifies her act and is even willing to openly defy

Creon's edict. The second major scene in which Antigone, displays her moral conviction is in her confrontation with Creon.

In this scene Antigones belief in divine law clashes with Creon's belief that the state posses all power. Sophocles presents the genuine conflict of duties between the two. Antigone admits right from the start that she wanted to carry out the burial because the action is ' glorious'. which highlights her hubris and her belief in the fact that the law of the state isn't absolute, as a result, she genuinely believes she was right to go against Creon's edict, in this extreme circumstance in order to honor the gods. whilst, Antigones high moral ground argument which calls for obedience to divine law may be true as it ' wasn't Zeus,' who made the edict. However, what Antigone doesn't realize is the fact that she like Creon has assumed the role to independently interpret the will of the Gods. Her pertinacious nature plays a huge role in her hubris, in this case, she is unable to comprehend the fact that her death may be meaningless as her basis for her reasoning may be flawed. She is unable to acknowledge the fact that she is contradicting herself, as she intends to die for her family and her beloved brother Polynices in order to please her family. When in fact her death will result in Ismene being left alone, causing Antigone in letting her family down. Antigone is undeniably presented as a tragic character in her death scene, wherein she has been found in a cave dead after having committed suicide. As Antigone being lead to the cave to be entombed she tells people she has done nothing wrong. She explicitly states the fact that she is innocent, and all she has done is to uphold the divine law by burying her brother Polynices. She says ' o look upon me.. how savagely impious men use me'. This proves the fact that

Antigone is still adamant in the fact that she will die as a martyr and her belief that she has the support of the people of Athens.

The Antigones tragic death is further emphasized by the fact that Creon's moment of anagnorisis has come too late. This suggests the fact that Antigone may have been right to believe in her moral convictions right to her last breathe, which may have resulted in the audience having a moment of catharsis. Nonetheless-ss its Antigones hubris and audacious nature that leads to her tragic downfall. Undoubtedly, Antigone is a fine tragic genre and the journeys these characters have gone through this play fit the aim of tragedy, which is to arouse pity and fear through the altercation in the status of a character, as he/she must be a figure which the audience can identify and whose fate can trigger these emotions. Both Antigone and Creon fit this description of a tragic character as both have this altercation in status due to their hubris. In Antigones case her defiance and disregard for her own life which causes her ' glorious death'. Her hubris doesn't enable her to see the perspective of her sister Ismene, as a result, Antigone delivers the same passionate strident speech throughout the cause of the play, unmoved by either pleadings or threats, which eventually leads to her own downfall. In Creon's case, his hubris doesn't allow him to deal with Antigones rebellious act effectively. In particular its Creon's strong belief in his philosophy that a good king should never lay down his pride that obscures his judgment, as Sophocles highlights this in Creon's altercation with Haemon where in which he dismisses Haqmons perfectly reasonable and just suggestion to reconsider his edict.