

Reflective of changes and problems english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Rebecca Baker Professor Tamara Smith History 101 Antigone In the play of Antigone, Sophocles introduces a set of problems that are quite reflective of changes and problems that were active in the Greek city-states. Greece was experiencing many changes, politically, socially, educationally, and in religion. Greece was at one time an Oligarchy, but became a democracy. Democracy became the form of government for the Greek city-state of Athens. Even though monarchy is the form of government in the play of Antigone, there are quite a few democratic themes shining through the underlying message. The idea of democracy is that the laws governing society and the fates of the people should not be placed into the hands of just one man. Creon is the king in this play, and he, in his pride, makes many bad decisions for the people causing the death of many and eventually leading to his own sorrow. The voice of reason comes from his son Haemon. Haemon tries to reason with his father the king, but his reasoning seems to only kindle the fire of Creon's pride. Haemon tries to come to his father in honor and humility. This he did because it is his place to honor his father, and because it seems that he was trying to use a form of psychology on him. Haemon begins by declaring that he is his father's man and that his father is his guide. Haemon's discussion with his father is laden with democracy. Haemon introduces democracy in the play to the audience. It seems reasonable to believe that Sophocles used Haemon as a form of propaganda to push the democratic view. The argument between Haemon and Creon became heated. Haemon explained to his father that the city agreed with Antigone that the gods should be obeyed above all, and the body of Polyneices should be buried properly. He urged his father to take advice.

Creon refused to be governed by his subjects. Haemon replied with this statement: " A city which belongs to just one man is no true city" (Sophocles 27). This is the idea of the very core of democracy. It seems evident that perhaps Sophocles viewed monarchy as being associated with pride. It makes sense to a democratic society that the idea of always being " right" and having absolute power over other people's lives is a prideful thing. Sophocles argues in the play of Antigone that pride is an evil disease that can overtake a person, and the end of it is sorrow and loss. Creon brings to the play the image of pride, but not just pride, pride with power. Creon is a display of what pride looks like, and where it leads to. Creon becomes so prideful and arrogant that he believes that his laws are above the gods and should be obeyed as such. He casts aside the law of the gods that demands that the dead be buried in a proper way. He decrees that anyone who buries Polyneices will be put to death. He is so dogmatic that he is right and is so unmovable that he dares to disrespect the prophet when he is warned. His pride is so strong that he will not back down to a prophet. He believes that his laws and beliefs are so far high above all others that even the prophet is wrong. He actually answers the prophet by saying, " What sort of pithy common thought are you about to utter?" (Sophocles 38). And when the prophet tries to show him his error, he is so arrogant that he asked the prophet, " You know you're speaking to the man who rules you" (Sophocles 38). This is insufferable disrespect to a holy man. The prophet Teiresias is a window into the religious beliefs in Ancient Greece. Greece was a very religious group of city-states. They practiced polytheism. They believed in gods that ruled from above, and gods that ruled the underworld. Teiresias

speaks of rituals and burnt offerings that the people made regularly to the gods. Apparently, they believed that if the burnt offering did not catch fire, then the gods did not accept the sacrifice. If the sacrifice was not accepted, then someone was doing evil and disobeying their laws. This all becomes evident in the story that Teiresias tells to Creon to explain of Creon's evil doing. Many people in Athens were being educated by the Sophists and the Philosophers. In this new form of education, people were learning logic and rationalism. Some, with this new learning, began to doubt religion and the gods. One Philosopher said that religion was invented for money and control. Some Greeks believed this. Perhaps this is why Sophocles made this prophet so honorable and all-knowing. Perhaps Sophocles was trying to restore religion to some of the Greeks who had in his opinion "gone astray". Maybe Sophocles is trying to say that this is what happens when you become prideful in believing that your own logic and your own understanding is all there is and that you don't need the wisdom of so-called gods. Sophocles may in fact be warning the audience of living godless lives and losing their religion. Antigone and her sister Ismene seem very close in the beginning of the play but their differences in loyalties drive a wedge between them. Antigone believes very strongly in her traditional upbringing, that loyalty to family and obedience to the gods should come first and foremost in a person's life and should be evident by their actions and decisions. Ismene is fearful for her life, and it seems that her loyalties lie in whatever will save her life. Ismene obviously loves her sister very much and is even willing to die with her later, but her loyalty initially lies with the king and his laws rather they be just or not. Antigone is traditional in her stance for loyalty to

family and the gods, but she is very untraditional about keeping her place as a woman in Athens' society. Women were to be completely obedient to the men. She was not afraid to speak out and go against the grain. She knew she was right and she felt that she should honor her brothers above what she believed were unjust laws. She explained to her sister, "...I'll do my duty to my brother—and yours as well, if you're not prepared to. I won't be caught betraying him" (Sophocles 4). Technically, her brothers owned her. Women had few rights in Athens at that time. This is where some of her traditionalism shows. She honored her brothers and would not see one be honored in death, and the other completely dishonored and shamed. Ismene probably loved her brothers as well but was a fearful woman. Traditionally, she should have seen to it that her brother received a proper burial, but she was willing to break that honor to her family and the gods in order to save her own life. She shows this fear in her response to Antigone saying, " Think how we'll die far worse than all the rest if we defy the law and move against the king's decree...We must remember that by birth we're women, and, as such, we shouldn't fight with men...since I'm being compelled, I will obey those in control" (Sophocles 4-5). Out of fear, Ismene moved her honor and obedience from her brothers, and gave them instead to the king. Antigone seems to be at odds with herself in some aspects, and yet completely together in others. She traditionally holds to her duties to honor her brothers and the gods as is her place as a woman. Yet, she becomes very untraditional in the fact that she is not afraid to speak her mind. She was not even afraid to speak against the king to his face. She gave him no honor, nor did she behave herself in a way befitting the inferior status that society

expected her to be. She instead behaved with pride and spoke forcefully to the king as if she were not only a man, but also, the king's equal. Ismene, when faced with her sister's death begged to be counted disobedient with her. Ismene begged to die with her sister. Yet, even in this she dared not to speak with boldness or disrespect to the king. These two girls could not have been more different. Yet, when it came down to it, neither one was apologetic to the king, nor were they remorseful in the deed that was done. Even though Ismene never helped her sister bury her brother, Ismene was also unapologetic about keeping her sister's secret. It seems evident that Ismene also believed that her brother deserved to be honored in death as was the law of the gods.