

Antigone written response



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CREON AND ANTIGONE: The most often asked question about the play *Antigone* by Sophocles, one of the three great Greek of tragedy, is who is the tragic hero of the play; is it Antigone or is it Creon? According to Aristotle's concept, a tragic hero is highly placed, highly renowned and prosperous character. He is neither good nor bad and is never perfect. Finally he is responsible for his own down fall. The downfall is from a height so that it assumes somewhat of a high emotional magnitude to create an impact on the audience. Only such a fall from a height with impact of high magnitude will lead the audience to what Aristotle calls "Catharsis", or purging away of bad traits in their own character. To quote *Poetics* by Aristotle: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action of high importance, complete and of some amplitude; in language enhanced by distinct and varying beauties; acted not narrated; by means of pity and fear effecting its purgation of these emotions." (From *Poetics*, *Eight Great Tragedies*, PP 406)

In this play both Antigone as well as Creon, the ruler of Thebes, seemingly qualify to be the tragic hero. As the play is titled *Antigone*, one tends to assume that she should be the tragic heroine of the play. But she actually fits into only few of the Aristotelian characteristics of a tragic hero. She is a princess. She is not good or bad in the extreme. She is loyal to her brother, Polyneices, for whom she wanted to give a decent burial. When Creon the king denies her this right, she questions the authority of the king and that leads to her death. Thus here is a fall from a highly dignified position which may seem to make Antigone the tragic heroine of the play. But her action is will full and is for a noble cause. She knew the consequences of her action and was ready to perish for it. She was doing what she thought was right. Creon on the other hand has all the characteristics to be an Aristotelian

tragic hero. He is not good, nor is he bad. Though his actions lead to the death of Antigone, he never intended to kill her. He was trying to keep the law of his own rule over the Thebans. But beyond this motif, his actions are out of his arrogance and stubbornness. He was so arrogant to think that being the king his was the final word with no responsibility to the people. “ No. I am king and responsible only to myself.” says Creon during his argument with his own son, Haemon. (Antigone, line 738, The Theban Plays, PP146). During this argument he refuses to admit the error in his judgment in deciding not to give Polyneices a burial. Polyneices was a rebel and hence Creon decided that his body be left in the battle field to be eaten up by vultures and worms, the harshest punishment of that time, which has no approval of the Gods. At the same time he decided that the dead body of Eteocles, who died in the battle with his own brother, that is Polyneices will be honored and buried. Though he wins the support of the Theban elders for his actions, Teiresias, the blind prophet is warning him that Gods are with Antigone. Instead of listening to the words of wisdom, he arrogantly accuses the prophet to be corrupt. Finally great tragedy falls on him. Antigone kills herself. Creon loses his son and his wife as well. He gets a punishment which is worse than death. He laments his tragic situation thus: “ I am nothing. I have no life /Lead me away.... (Lines 1338-39, Ibid PP, 161). Though the audience feel sympathy for him, it was all too late for him. Thus Creon as one who gets doomed because of his own action and defiance of the God’s will is definitely the tragic hero of this play. The chorus closes the play by saying that Gods punish the proud. But the chorus reminds the audience that such punishment brings wisdom too. “ This is the law/ That seeing the stricken heart/ Of pride brought down / We learn when we are old.” (Lines, <https://assignbuster.com/antigone-written-response/>

1350-53, Ibid PP162)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINAL SCENE: The final scene is where Creon comes to know of the consequences of his actions. He wanted to correct himself; but it was late. He had gone out to free Antigone from the cave where she was imprisoned, but by the time he reaches there she had hanged herself.

Haemon, Creon's son who wanted to marry Antigone, stabs himself to death, after an argument with his father. Eurydice, Creon's wife, after hearing about these tragic happenings kills herself. Creon wails about his mistakes and wrong decisions and expresses guilt over the killing of his own son and wife. He laments how false pride has led to his own downfall.

The thematic question posed by Sophocles is this: which law is greater; the law of man or that of the God? The play stands by the law of the God, without belittling the greatness of man. (" Wonders are many on earth and the greatest of these is man Says, the Chorus. Ibid PP135). The message thus Sophocles gives to the Theban people is to remain alert against the arrogance of their rulers. When the rulers get arrogant the country will get destroyed morally. Sophocles points out at this dangerous trend in the character of the kings in another of his plays, Oedipus the King, the prequel to Antigone. (Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus) There the tragedy is brought about by the arrogance of Oedipus, the king. This lesson is valid not only to the Theban people but to the rulers and the people of the modern world too.

More valid to the modern times is the theme of the right of the individual to reject the attempt by the Government or the society to control his/her freedom to perform his/her personal obligations. Antigone fights such controlling efforts by Creon. While Creon stands for the laws made by men,

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Antigone stands for much more higher values which can be called divine values. This struggle between personal freedom and the dictates of the State is valid more in the modern social life. The State often sees the citizens as slaves of the laws imposed by it on them. Such situations make the rulers arrogant . They arrogantly deny the rights of the people. This leads to the moral disintegration of the country and its people. This is the lesson Sophocles wants to give to his people and which stands valid even today.

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Works Cited:

- 1) Antigone, Sophocles/ The Theban Plays, Translated by E. F. Watling, Penguin Classics, December 1946.
- 2) Aristotle: From The Poetics, Translated by L. J. Potts, Eight Great Tragedies, A Mentor Book, Published by The New American Library, New York. 1957.