

The use of light and dark images in antigone



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The “ Golden Age” of Greece is notorious for its many contributions to the creative world, especially in its development of the play. These primitive performances strived to emphasize Greek morals, and were produced principally for this purpose. Antigone, by Sophocles, is typical. The moral focused on in Antigone is the conflict between physis (nature) and nomos (law), with physis ultimately presiding over nomos. Throughout Antigone, King Creon is a symbol for nomos, while Antigone stands on the side of physis. To portray these ideas, light and dark images are used as a recurring motif to reinforce the theme. Light is used to show something good that is happening, whereas dark is utilized to show show of something of which the gods disapprove. Following with tradition, this play uses light to portray what is right in the eyes of the chorus and darkness to reproach the other side. As the play is carried out, the chorus is constantly changing its opinions, first believing in the actions of Creon with respect to nomos, then unsure of what to believe, and finally seeing that Antigone’s actions are more consistent with the morality of the gods and the truths of physis. Light and darkness are used to support in an emotional way the action of whoever the chorus is siding with at these various stages of the play. It is clear that at the beginning of Antigone, the chorus favors the actions of Creon, or nomos. This is shown as Creon’s intentions and retribution towards Polyneices are justified by jovial words and imagery involving light. In the battle between Eteocles and Polyneices, although both leaders were killed, Eteocles’ army was the victor. To show that this was positive in the eyes of the gods, the first line of the Parodos in the Prologue refers to the battle as a “ blade of sun”. The morning following the battle was then called a “ beautiful morning of victory”. These are all positive feedback to the victory of Eteolces, and <https://assignbuster.com/the-use-of-light-and-dark-images-in-antigone/>

with the help of these light images, it is easy to identify the chorus' thoughts. Another praise to Creon is found in Ode I, where his law against burying Polyneices is referred to as "clear intelligence". In this instance, "clear" is used in the sense that it is easily visible, or obvious, making the statement positive for Creon. Later, in Ode I, the gods again side with Creon, as they refer to his decisions in lines 4 to 5, "Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven/With shining furrows where his plows have gone..." The gods are praising Creon; "shining furrows where his plows have gone" imply that he has left a good indent on matters that he has ruled on, in this case referring to the law against burying Polyneices. It is once again apparent that *nomos* is being favored by the chorus. As the middle of *Antigone* approaches, the chorus seems to be unsure of whom to favor, and is torn between *physis* and *nomos*. Because of this, references to light and dark motifs in scenes two and three are ironic, and sometimes even contradictory. In lines 89 to 90 of Scene II, Creon claims, "...crimes kept in the dark/Cry for light". As Creon says this in regards to Antigone, this statement, ironically, could apply to him as well, as his recent actions and abuse of his power could also be considered a crime. This comment actually foreshadows Creon's own fate. Another ironic instance is present in line 37 of Scene III, when Haimon says to Creon, "You make things clear for me, and I obey you." Clear is an ambiguous word, used here to show how Haimon is unsure of whose side to favor. Like the chorus, he starts out favoring Creon, but later sides with Antigone. Another example of irony comes when Antigone is doomed for death. As the time comes for her to get locked up and killed, she is feeling dejected and sad, and is looking for pity. Yet, she comes to realize that fate had brought her to this point, and it was not her fault, but was inherited by

her from her father, Oedipus, and his family. Figuring this out, because Antigone has fulfilled her fate and realizes that she has not done anything wrong, she becomes spiritually immortal. She has succeeded in doing what she thought was right, (burying her brother), and she knows that the gods are on her side. This realization helps her to face her death. Yet, in line 7 of Scene IV, she continues speaking as if she has not figured this out. She says "...good-bye to the sun that shines no longer." This continues through line 50 of Scene IV where she declares, "...the very light of sun is cold to me." These statements imply that Antigone will die both physically and spiritually, although both she and the reader knows that this is not what will happen. The final turn comes in the last two scenes of Antigone, when Creon finally realizes that he is in the wrong. He discovers that physis truly does supersede nomos, and, although he attempts to make amends, he is too late. Ode IV introduces this fact that the chorus has changed its mind, and Antigone's actions with the idea of physis are presiding over Creon's values with regards to nomos. It says, " Zeus in a rain of gold poured love upon [Antigone]." The word gold is a reference to light and contains positive connotations. This change in thought is ascertained in Scene V, when Teiresias tells Creon of his recent omen regarding Creon: I began the rites of burnt offering at the altar, But... instead of bright flame,...the entrails dissolved in gray smoke,...And no blaze! Creon's omen states that the " bright flame", his previous time of being favored by the gods, also a light reference which hold positive connotations, has worn out. This is a symbol of Creon's pride, law, and power, which was abused , and has resulted in gray smoke, a gloomy image and a reference to dark. This shows that Creon's intentions are now not favored by the gods, as the gods saw that Creon's

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pride with connection to nomos was too high, and images referring to him are now dark and dismal. The play ends as the gods have turned their shoulder on Creon, and have made their final decision that Antigone is ultimately in the right. Because the sole purpose of Antigone is to get a moral point across, the parallels between light and dark and physis and nomos are associated together, and used metaphorically to add diversity and imagery to an otherwise redundant script. In the first scenes, these light and dark images show the reign of Creon. These are followed by the indistinct and ironic middle scenes, and end with the gods choosing Antigone's actions over Creon's, leaving Creon spiritually dead and paying for his poor choices and conduct. These are very effective techniques, which allow Sophocles to more fully develop his play, and give it a more emotional edge.