

# Analysis of "antigone" by sophocles

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Poetry is never absolute. It can never be deciphered, since each poem has a different meaning to an individual. When we put the verses of the ancient Greek play Antigone together, what we see is a faded outline of a tragedy. It was the act of breaking down the scenes and annotating them that helped me see the colors that the playwright, Sophocles, painted.

As I delved deeper into the hidden meanings of Antigone, I began to ponder over questions about where the author found his muse for tragedies. Before I wrote this essay, I looked up the biography of Sophocles. What I learned is that Sophocles' life story was the opposite of what I expected it to be: he grew up in a wealthy family, and was given an exceptional education. He was good-natured as a person, and he enjoyed entering in playwriting contests. Although he fought for the military in the Peloponnesian War, he mostly lived a sheltered life as a government official. It is with those facts we can see where Sophocles was introduced into the strenuous role of a leader.

I believe that it is the character of King Creon that represents what Sophocles did not like about Greek society. As much of a nice person he has been documented to be, Sophocles was also a very careful observer of Greek society. Playwriting was simply his medium of self-expression towards the world. In Antigone, Creon fails as a leader because he believes he can attain a Godly status through fear, diminishes the rights of women, and refuses to reason with the younger generations. Through lines 316-350 where Creon angrily responds to his Guard, it shows that Creon is jealous that he is not the God's main concern. He states that, " The Gods approving men of evil deeds? It is not so; but men of rebel mood, lifting their head in secret long ago, have stirred this thing against me.

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Never yet had they their neck beneath the yoke, content to own me as their ruler." King Creon is in shock. He wonders why the Gods would even care about Polynices, as if saying ' Why him over me?' He believes that he should be the Gods' main concern, since he has the power to send a man to death over law. And yet the Gods still expect him to deal justly with rebel men. Creon decides to take back that power from the Gods by making an irrational ruling to kill the person who buried Polynices. Further into the play, lines 1024 and 1025 show Creon invoking fear onto his subject by narrating, " Our hands are clean in all that touches her; but she no more shall sojourn here with us.

" Creon says that by wiping out Antigone, he will finally be able to clean his palette from the rebellion and start fresh with an even stronger rule. I think it is ironic that Creon believes that death will rid him of his troubles, when he will forever have blood on his hands. During lines 765-770, Creon speaks that he must maintain obedience through the citizens of Thebes in order to keep the kingdom together, saying, " Anarchy is our worst evil, brings our commonwealth to utter ruin, lays whole houses low, in battle strife hurls men in shameful flight." It is in Creon's mind that the act of obedience keeps the natural world in check. Everything in the food chain must be a subject to another, and if one organism breaks away, the whole food web is afflicted.

What Creon is unaware of is that in the natural world, the higher an organism is in the food web, the less impact it has. What Creon should be concerned about are the working citizens of Thebes. If they commit anarchy, then the entire kingdom will fall. Plus, Antigone's bravery is inspiring these citizens to

do so under Creon's nose Lines 521-546 are of Creon's, criticizing the ways of Antigone. What he does not realize is that he is a hypocrite.

Creon says, " Know, then, minds too stiff most often stumble, and the rigid steel baked in the furnace, made exceedingly hard, thou seest most often split in broken lie." Creon comments about Antigone and how her determination will be her downfall. Then, Creon states that it is the will of women that could bring down a kingdom, a quote very similar to ' Hell hath no fury as a woman scorned.' Creon speaks that it is the duty of a man to put ' dangerous' women back into their place, even if it means giving a woman the same punishment as a man. Although the fact that Antigone is his own niece is irrelevant to Creon, it disgusts him how Antigone does not cower in fear over the fact that death is near.

Lines 599-604, although short, make a good connection between ancient Greece and Christian symbolism. Creon says to Ismene, " And thou who, creeping as a viper creeps, didst drain my life in secret, and I knew not that I was rearing two accursed ones." When Creon says ' creeping as a viper creeps' I got the image of Eve and the snake. I understand that Christianity was not practiced during Grecian times, however the New Testament of the Bible was commissioned to include pagan symbols into the gospels. Why has this image of a life-giving woman become associated with the mysterious, dangerous snake? I believe Creon used this snake metaphor to degrade Ismene and Antigone, because not only did they disobey a man, they disobeyed the king. I get the feeling that what Creon only truly wants is for

his people to know is that all he does he does because he thinks it is the right thing to do.

In lines 741-747, Creon scorns Haemon about the woes of women by saying, " Lost not thy reason, then, my son, o'ercome by pleasure, for a woman's sake, but know, a cold embrace is that to have at home." It makes me a little sad that Creon has never felt any love in marriage. He thinks that wives are only meant to bear children, while the husbands are meant to face the world alone. Then again, the fact that Creon believes wives should be isolated just makes love impossible to happen. The lines 814-819 in my opinion apply the most to America's young citizens. Haemon pleads with his father, " Do thou, then, yield.

Permit thyself to change. Young though I be, if any prudent thought be with me, I at least will dare assert the higher worth of one who, come what will, is full of knowledge." I think Haemon makes a good point that plays a big part in our society today. It is the young people who are excelling in this nation, who have the biggest potential in making our country great. If the older generations continue not to focus their main concerns on the education of the future, then like Thebes, America will fall to ruin.

Lines 737-740 shows Creon debates with Haemon, making his point on how Haemon should raise his children, " But he who reareth sons that profit not, what could one say of him but this, that he breeds his own sorrow, laughter to his foes?" I remember talking the act of raising of children in a class recently. Many kids in my class said that they would not raise their children the same way that their parents did. I think it is ridiculous that Creon expects

Haemon to raise his own children as Creon did. I think that Creon is scared that his grandchildren will try to make peace with the foes Creon has made; showing compassion other than strength. The lines 580-585 show the conversation between Antigone and Creon, arguing over their views of good versus evil. This short dialogue was what I believed was the strongest section of the play, “ Not the less does death crave equal rights for all/ But not that good and evil share alike?/ And yet who knows if in that world these things are counted good?” This short dialogue between Creon and Antigone is in many ways a big philosophical question.

What is good? What is bad? Never once has Antigone defended that Polynices was a good person, while Creon is quick to judge. Antigone buried her brother solely because she understands that every man or woman deserves to rest in peace and to let go of their past lives. While Creon counters Antigone’s claims with the fact that good and evil are two very separate things, Antigone knows that the line between good and evil is very blurred. In the end of Antigone, King Creon learned the fault in his ways. However, our modern society has still not found the courage to admit its mistakes.

Even though democracy has spread throughout the globe, our politicians are still making choices that would just benefit them, leaving only empty promises to the citizens. Did Sophocles predict that maybe one day, justice will be delivered, or is Antigone just another Greek myth?