

# Antigone as a feminist icon

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Antigone as a Feminist Icon Male authority is a dominant theme in Sophocles' "Antigone." Men occupied the land, ruled the towns and assigned the women duties to perform. Antigone, however, believed that she was just as strong as the men who ruled society during that time, which led to her downfall. The goal of the feminist movement has generally been to seek equality between the sexes. Through the women's movement, women have won the right to vote, and can now compete for traditionally male roles in the workplace.

Although the feminist movement has largely taken place during the last 200 year, many figures in history have embodied characteristics of the contemporary feminist, such as the character of Antigone in Sophocles' "Antigone." Antigone's introduction as a feminist is within the context of a fiercely sexist civilization. Sophocles paints a vivid portrait of a male dominated society. In 442 BC, women believed that they were inferior to men because men held power and influence over the people and the cities.

The patriarchy consisted of men who considered themselves of higher importance and standing, and men who would assign women duties and expect them to perform without question. This authoritarian rule placed women in a subordinate role and extinguished any hopes of power. In the face of this efficiently and tightly controlled agency, Antigone rebels with what Catherine Holland describes as an "otherness" and an "anti-authoritarian" bent. Her very existence as the protagonist and, simultaneously, the antagonist defines her character as the adversary of man and thereby the adversary of the world.

Antigone's razor sharp temerity captures the spirit of modern and nascent feminism as she slashes the societal fabric into which she is woven. Antigone's relationship with her sister Ismene also acutely expresses her feminist attributes. Ismene says " You ought to realize we are only women, not meant in nature to fight against men, and that we are ruled by those who are stronger. " These words provide insight into the female animus. Antigone confronts the difficult situation of whether or not to bury her brother Polynices against the wishes of her uncle, Creon the king.

Ismene believes that women, including herself and Antigone, should not and cannot disobey Creon's orders by burying their own brother. Antigone disagrees and decides to proceed with her plan. Her divergent thought puts her at odds with her entire family and her own survival. This speaks to the power of feminist thought. Antigone shines as a beacon for her contemporaries and for future generations who aspire to emulate her courage and honor. Vital to the play is Antigone's conflict with Creon.

Her resolute feminist ideology is perhaps most profound in regards to her interaction and relationship with her misogynistic and powerful uncle, the King of Thebes. Creon is a central patriarchal figure in society, and he renounces his beliefs in order to follow the laws of man. He values the laws of man above all other creeds, be they religious or moral. Conversely, Antigone follows the laws of the gods. She holds these principals paramount to the laws of Creon. When her mores, in particular, her family values, are impugned by the oppressive, myopic laws of the day, Antigone clashes with the intolerable, indulgent influence of Creon.

With a fearless countenance she collides with Creon in a representative “battle of the sexes.” Creon forbids the burial of Antigone’s brother Polynices, which vexes the core of her family values. This profound allegiance compels her to disregard her place in society, while concurrently adhering to the traditional duty of women of that era. She now embodies a complicated and dynamic actor in her own story and the narrative of feminist thought. Antigone manifests the apogee of human probity, including fortitude and approbation for the gods.

The law of the gods mandate that a proper burial right be given to a body. To Antigone this was more salient than Creon’s declaration otherwise. She reserves a traditional role as a woman; while also brazenly confronting this image. Challenging him through word and deed, she verbally criticizes him and ignores his decree against burying her brother. Creon becomes enraged by this rejection of his autonomy and condemns Antigone to death. Even though Creon knows that Antigone is the daughter of Jocasta, he knows that he must consummate his judgment to conserve his command over and respect of the people of Thebes.

This battle between chauvinism of Creon and the conscious of Antigone sets the stage for the new king to secure his role as a strong and worthy leader. If he is feared and admired, he will be confirmed as the sublime authoritative force in Thebes. His deference to the state will engender the obedience of the people. Creon’s derisive manipulation to coerce others conflicts with Antigone’s courageous challenge to his leadership. Many of the men of Thebes embraced Creon’s bold assertions against women. As a model of defiance, Antigone is used to set an example to all of Thebes.

Antigone is not only the first woman but first person whom intentionally defies Creon's order to not bury her brother, who has been acknowledged a traitor to Thebes. Creon refuses to humble himself before others, or compromise on the issue but most importantly with women. He states that it is " Better to fall from power, if fall we must, at the hands of a man-never to rated inferior to a woman, never". Antigone does not give Creon additional respect based on the fact that he a man in patriarchal society or because he is king. Rather she argues that there shall be equality under God and the equality among all of the sexes.

Antigone makes it clear to Ismene that she will take action relating to their brother regardless if Ismene agrees or not. Although they argue, there difference in opinion stand out in the end. Antigone is brave enough to stand firm on her decision and although Ismene is far too weak to defy the kings laws, she still feels as if she holds somewhat of a responsibility towards her sister. Without the help of her sister, Ismene, Antigone is willing to put her life at risk in order to provide for her brother and give him what deserves as far as the what the Gods say should be done.

Despite Creon, Antigone is willing to test male authority although it may mean not fulfilling her duties as a sister. Ismene states: " Remember we are women, we're not born to contend with men. Then too, we're underlings, ruled by much stronger hands, so we must submit in this, and things still worse". These words express Ismene's extreme fear of subordination towards men. It shows her viewpoint on how the laws restricted the lives of woman and inferiority men placed upon women.

A sense of responsibility is placed upon Ismene to die with her sister as the result of Antigone's plea for help and her fear of being without family. When Creon spoke to Haemon, about the actions of his fiancée, he strongly stresses the importance of obligations and the relationships of a man to his father over his wife. Furthermore, he emphasizes the position of males in judgment making by stating, " Oh Haemon, never lose your sense of judgment over a woman" Haemon's defiance to his father led Creon to proclaim him a " woman's slave," a man who is unfortunately sided with a woman.

Creon had strong belief that these types of actions were close to committing a sin. If Antigone had been born the son of Oedipus, Creon would not have the authority to choose, as his crown would rest upon Antigone's head. If Antigone were a male and Creon had been king, the possibility of her opinion on Polynices' burial may have been considered. However, Antigone's femininity made her situation more problematic than it was, as the King completely overlooked Antigone's judgment over the matter. In conclusion, Antigone validates feminist opinions in numerous ways.

She begins to challenge society by her existence in the establishment of a dominant male society guided by her own uncle. Antigone defies her own sister and her own mortality as she stays loyal to her beliefs regardless of Creon's devotion to his own laws. Antigone as a woman, acted out in obligation as a duty for her family and for the Gods. Her integrity serves as an example for her society. Antigone faced her mortality head on, which suggests that she possesses a strong characteristic of bravery and obstinacy.

Her legacy will live on to inspire many other insurgents to take a stand on their principles.

Antigone's solid feminist stance as a rebelling and male-controlled dictator shows that individualistic thinking and actions can be very powerful in both past and present modern day society. Works Cited Amacher, Richard E. " Antigone: " The Most Misread of Ancient Plays". " National Council of Teachers of English 20. 7 Apr. (1959): 355-58. Web. 4 Nov. 2012. ; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/372655>; Holland, Catherine A. " After Antigone: Women, the Past, and the Future of Feminist Political Thought. " American Journal of Political Science 42. Oct. (1998): 1108-32. Web. 4 Nov. 2012. ; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2991851>; Klemperer, Klemens V. "" What is the Law That Lies behind These Words? " Antigones Question and the German Resistance against Hitler. " The Chicago Press 64 Dec. (1992): S102-11. Web. 4 Nov. 2012. ; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124971>; Knapp, Charles. " A Point in the Interpretation of the Antigone of Sophocles. " The American Journal of Philology 37. 3 (1916): 300-16. Web. 4 Nov. 2012. ; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/849663>; Schilb, John, and John