

Works in translation



In the Greek tragic play *Antigone* written by Sophocles, The king of Thebes, Creon does not feel confident despite seemingly unlimited power. He publicly announces his decision to capitally punish an offender of his order. The sole offender, Antigone, Polynices' sister, is caught and brought to him for judgment. Nevertheless, she behaves provocatively, yet Creon hesitates to bring her to death. He is building his arguments in conversations with Antigone, the chorus and his son Haemon as if he is not sure that he is right, or does not have enough authority to do it, or both. At one moment, driven by rage, Creon wants to execute Antigone in the presence of his son, but later withdraws his intention. His decision to bury Antigone alive is not only contentious and awkward, but also incomplete and potentially reversible. Creon gives the impression that he wants to offer Antigone a choice. Why does he do it and why is he so controversial in his attitude to Antigone's punishment? This essay uncovers the weaknesses of his character that explains his behavior. Creon's inconsistent attitude towards death and burial reveals a controversial and a vulnerable character hidden under the mask of an autocratic ruler. Creon wants to be a resolute king but fails to fulfill his public promises. He cares about the his city of Thebes and its ancient laws. Yet, his country is in danger and he seems to feel that he, " a mere mortal, could override the gods"[1] in his desire to deny dead Polynices a proper burial. This may well be a violation of the unwritten divine laws, but no one dares to dispute it except Antigone. Her iron determination and defiance of death shatter the Creon's confidence. Antigone is not the kind of offender that Creon expects, not even because she is a fiancé of his son. Rather unexpectedly, she claims that religion is on her side and thus openly challenges Creon's authority. His seemingly sound decision to punish the

traitor and thus deter others from treason looks arbitrary and dubious during the course of the play. In a desperate attempt to find more arguments, Creon finally loses his temper and throws an unthinkable challenge to the gods: he would not allow to bury the body of Polynices in the grave, even if “ Zeus’s eagles rip the corpse/and wing their rotten pickings off to the throne of god!”[2] Creon reveals that he is driven more by emotion than by logic by elevating himself above the gods. Emotional as he is, Creon may be determined to bestow a punishment upon Antigone as quickly as possible. Yet, something stands in his way, something that does not allow him to execute Antigone without delay. The author provides an explanation to Creon’s indecisiveness earlier in the play when the king delivers strange sentence to Antigone. When Creon meets his loyal son Haemon, he calls for his support and initially receives it. Creon is well satisfied and, being in a pleasant mood, propagates his son to “ let [Antigone] find a husband among the dead”. [3] Thus, Creon appears to be determined to execute Antigone. Yet Haemon is adamant and pleads mercy for his fiancé. In the following passionate rant, Creon once again displays his emotion and, at one point, is ready to execute Antigone “ in front of [Haemon’s] eyes, besides her groom!”[4] The end is nearing, yet the king of Thebes is hesitant again. When Haemon exits the stage, Creon crafts Antigone a bizarre punishment to “ wall her up alive/in a rocky vault, and set out short rations...”[5] Such penalty looks incomplete and potentially reversible. It is odd to see a king undo his decision in a matter of minutes. Creon is however not without a reason: simultaneously, he releases Antigone’s sister, Ismene, “ the one whose hands are clean”. [6] There must be a reason for Creon’s awkward change of course. He seems to be torn between the demands of his king’s

duties and his increasing indecisiveness. There is powerful symbolism present in his act: Creon has prior ordered that the dead body of a traitor Polynices be left unburied and has now arranged the entombment of Antigone alive. Creon appears here as a weak and controversial character and the author provides further evidence of this when Antigone is taken to her custody.