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The Obligation of Antigone

In Sophocles' melodramatic tragedy, a "collision between the two highest powers" was created. Conflicts arise throughout the play that unfortunately ended in despair. Our main protagonist, Antigone becomes an agent to her own destruction regardless of how well intended her decisions were. Our character chooses what aligns with what her moral compass values the most: family. This character is bound to duty and the love of her familial traditions for the sake of her brother, Polynices' burial. Though Antigone is equally right for her decisions, she is just as equally wrong. Due to her stubbornness, she doubles down on her family's morals regardless of the repercussions of a public death and shame by the hands of her uncle, Creon. Therefore, by analyzing her behaviors, we can understand the humanity of this character.

Throughout the play, Antigone begins to display behaviors of a tragic hero by rebelling against the state from the beginning of the play; owning her fate, "I saw her burying the very corpse you had forbidden." (pg. 3) and "I will bury him myself; I die for doing that good" (lines 87-88). Antigone is firstly introduced in this play as a criminal, Creon made it known that it was against the state to bury Polynices, but Antigone knew of this and took charge of choices. When her sister, Ismene attempted to lie to Creon to save her "I did the deed if she agreed I did. I am

accessory and share the blame” (pg.5). Antigone refuses, “Justice will not allow this. You did not wish for a part, nor did I give you one” and “...chose to live when I chose death” (pg.5). Yet, when Antigone was caught by the guards, and they ushered her to Creon for punishment she still held attributes of bravery, confidence and passion. This was proved further “Like father, like daughter, passionate, wild . . . she hasn't learned to bend before adversity” (lines 527-529) showcasing the next characteristic of a tragic hero as she was born into nobility. It is a rarity to see a woman in this time present these traits of a traditional, stoic masculine man. In this time, most women in Greek society were viewed as objects and to be docile for breeding offspring, nothing more. Ismene proves this by saying to Antigone “A monarch's will? --weak women, think of that, Not framed by nature to contend with men. Remember this too that the stronger rules; We must obey his orders, these or worse.” (49-68). Ismene is consumed by fear of the state and wants Antigone to understand that due to their womanhood they have no room to defy the state. On the other hand, Ismene, her sister, does exhibit societal expectations and manages out of her own moral obligation to family to protect her sister from committing a crime.

Antigone was everything but this societal expectation through her wit and advocacy of what she believes as morally right: “It wasn’t Zeus...who made this proclamation not to me. I think your edict had such force that you, mere mortal, could override the gods, the great unwritten, unshakable traditions” (500-507). Antigone discusses divine versus state laws and how Creon lacks respect for the divine laws as well as the ability to override the laws that were rooted in “unshakeable traditions” further highlighting how she was guided by the divine laws and respecting tradition over the laws of the state. Antigone’s several attempt to give a

rightful burial creates an uproar in the town. Therefore, when Antigone was reduced to the confinement of the stone vault she shouts to the Gods, “But if these men are wrong, let them suffer nothing worse than they mete out to me (1019-1021).” Unfortunately, as many tragic heroes are the agent to their own demise, she commits suicide, and leaves this realm with a clear conscious. This is shown by the Gods not punishing her within her last words, “all for reverence, my reverence for the **gods!**” (1034), her actions were validated and even in the end she never lost faith in the gods’ divine laws. Yet, as the tragic hero was doomed to die through her heroism in the process creating unforeseeable consequences of death and uproar. Tragedy fell upon Haemon, Eurydice, and Creon individually. Antigone’s betrothed, Haemon rebels against his own father and obligation to the state to convince her father to release Antigone but ends up dying by Antigone’s corpse: “He killed himself, angry at his father’s killing” (pg.12). Eurydice, the queen was deeply saddened by her son’s death, “Struck home at her own heart when she had heard of Haemon’s suffering” (pg.14). Lastly, Creon felt a need proclaim “Take me at once.... my son, against my meaning, and you too, my wife” (pg.14). He felt shame for abandoning his family and feeling a deep sense of regret for remaining stubborn to the warnings. These were all consequences of Antigone’s decisions, tragedy and suffering for everyone around her. Though her actions were morally right, it begins to question were her actions worth the results? To understand the humanity of this character examining how her actions were morally wrong adds layers of complexity and nuance needed to fully comprehend her choices.

To circle back to her stubbornness, a characteristic that she is known for, defies the orders of Creon without hesitation. “...this girl giving that dead man’s corpse full rites-an act you’d

made illegal " (lines 456-457). Creon's rule was set in stone and Antigone did everything she could to challenge that "I beg you: kill me" (358). Yet, Antigone receives sympathy due to the injustices of her brother instead of understanding regardless of her emotional connection to the burial King Creon made a law and his authority should not be questioned. This highlights how morally wrong Antigone has been to deny the laws for her own personal gains. Creon is fully entitled to make laws that fit the needs of the state, therefore viewed her advocacy and defiance as a sign of disrespect. Creon condemned Antigone with quickness, neglecting the familial connection and ignoring every confirmation that provided his actions as unjust, "Your act of grace, in his regard, is a crime". (483). So, Creon was displeased by Antigone's ability to rebel against the state and reveals imperfections of the internal structure of state preventing him from having control of subjects. This could have caused a collapse of the government. Her actions involved Creon to believe Ismene was involved in burial stating "Now tell me, do you say you shared this deed? Or will you swear you didn't even know? "and " When she broke the bounds beyond" (pg.5). Creon blames Ismene for her actions though she had nothing to do with this refusing Antigone's order and humbling her to remind her of her palace as her fierceness exposes the roles switching, "No woman rules while I live "and "I am no man and she the man instead". (pg.5). Yet, Creon has these assumptions due to his own insecurities as a man within a position of power. Antigone's actions throughout the play showcase her humanity and how her morals have created demise amongst everyone within the play morally right or wrong adding the complexity of her character.