



ANTIGONE

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation



ANTIGONE

Antigone is a play of one of the famous ancient Greek authors Sophocles, who lived in the fifth century BCE. It is a real masterpiece of the ancient Greek literature, which survived along with six other plays of this author. Sophocles wrote about 123 plays during his life, but, unfortunately, most of them were lost in the course of time. Nevertheless, *Antigone* is one of the most prominent ancient plays, cherished by world's famous philosophers as Hegel, Steiner, Tyrrell, Bennett, and many others. Moreover, it is used for educational purposes because it has a great philosophical, ethical, ethnographic, historical, educational, and cultural significance in the world's literature. As Hegel stated, the play was one of the greatest literary works ever produced. The main character of the play, Antigone, has been a subject for various discussions between scholars for over two centuries. On the one hand, they tried to elicit whether her intention to bury her brother was an act of political disobedience or a feminist uprising against a male superiority. On the other hand, most of the scholars agreed to confess the fact that when a government creates a law contradicting with human virtues as love to family, as it is shown in the play, it will lead to the most tragic consequences, even to death of innocent people.

The other characters of the play are Antigone's sister Ismene and King of Thebes, Creon. The action of the play took place in Ancient Greece, when the father of Antigone and Ismene, Oedipus, King of Thebes, had to blind himself out of desperation and infamy, having found out the truth that his wife, Jocaste, was his mother. Jocaste could not stand it and committed suicide. Thus, Antigone, Ismene, and their two brothers, Polyneices and Eteocles, became full orphans. To make things worse, Polyneices invited foreign forces to fight against Eteocles for the Greek throne. In the result, the brothers killed each other, and their uncle Creon became a new king. The first edict of Creon was to forbid committing Polyneices to earth under penalty of death. Burying relatives was a traditional obligation for Greek women at that time.

Moreover, Greeks considered this custom was submitted by their gods, and nobody could violate the gods' will. Thus, the main conflict between the human will of King and the gods' law emerged. Of course, older people did not agree to guard the corpse lest somebody should bury him.

Antigone decided to bury her brother, Polyneices, according to their gods' law. Therefore, she invited Ismene to help her, urging with the words, "you'll quickly demonstrate whether you are nobly born, or else a girl unworthy of her splendid ancestors" (Sophocles 2007, p. 7). Ismene refused to help with burying Polyneices, "We must remember that by birth we're women, and as such, we shouldn't fight with men... I can't act against the state. That's not in my nature" (p. 9). It is a key point of the conflict, which caused disputes between prominent philosophers and have lasted for over two centuries. Thus, Hegel stated that Antigone embodied philosophy of a family connected with Greek customs and people, but Creon was identified as a statesman, who created laws and did his best in order for his edicts to be observed, and his first law concerned a dead man. Therefore, readers observed conflicts between masculine and feminine natures, between state and individual, and between future in the shape of a family with its virtues and past in the shape of Creon's attitude to dead Polyneices. As a matter of fact, if Polyneices had been an ally of Creon instead of Eteocles, Creon would have acted the same way regarding Eteocles. Creon was an example of an honest statesman, considering elimination of corruption his first task. However, in this particular case he was wrong because there was neither corruption nor hostility to the state in deeds of Antigone.

As Sophocles stated, Creon considered a state as a ship and himself as a captain of that vessel, who led it on the right course to the rule of law. As he stated in the play, "a man who rules the entire state and does not take the best advice there is, but through fear keeps his mouth forever shut... is very worst of men" (Sophocles, p. 13). Such a metaphor is very useful to understand the whole character of Creon. At those ancient times, ships were driven by human

force. Mainly, they were galleys with slaves. Of course, there was no room for women among sailors, and it was shown by Creon's attitude to them in discussion with his son. He considered them as inferior human beings, and, as Ismene stated, women should always obey men. In essence, women were considered as prizes for men, or as goods, which had a certain cost at that time. Therefore, a state was not a ship, as Creon had imagined, but a forced-labor camp, and he was like a supervisor in it. For instance, Creon neglected friendship, freedom, and family for the sake of the state. It was the main mistake of Creon.

Every state consists of families. Therefore, a family is considered to be a social unit created by people on the basis of mutual interests in managing households, educating children, and getting profit. Therefore, a leader of a country should be like a father of a great family to take care about each individual irrespective of his or her social position. In this particular case, Antigone did not commit any crime to be punished to death. On the contrary, she observed a national Greek tradition to bury her brother. Thus, Creon violated the national tradition abusing his power, which proves there is no coincidence when blind Theiresias stated that Creon committed sin to fight against dead men. In the result, Antigone, as a daughter worthy of her parents, fulfilled her duty for her brother and forced Creon to suffer from her suicide. As Hegel states, "we also see Creon punished by the grievous loss of his wife and [his son] Haemon, who both likewise perish owing to the death of Antigone" (Hegel 2010, p. 471). Therefore, it was not a political action, but a desperate deed of the woman humiliated by a wrong law.

References

Hegel, G.W.F. (2010). *Aesthetics lectures on fine art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sophocles. (2007). *Antigone*. Arlington VA: Richer Resources Publications.