Antigone Essay, Research Paper

Antigone – Interpretative Essay

A tragic hero, according to Aristotelian definitions, is a “highly renowned and prosperous” character. This figure is not perfect and has to be on some level responsible for his or her downfall. The hero’s punishment usually exceeds the crime. By the end of the play, this hero recognizes his or her own error or flaw and accepts the overwhelming retribution. Through this experience, he or she finally gains wisdom.

In Antigone by Sophocles, Creon fits the term tragic hero more adequately than Antigone. The two have some character flaws, and both are responsible for their own tragic consequences. They are proud, stubborn people, and their unwillingness to recognize their folly sparks the bitter conflict between them. Yet Antigone does not experience any significant downfall nor is she enlightened in any way at the end. Creon, on the other hand, is a great man reduced to a pitiable condition as a result of a tragic flaw and is humbled by this tragedy.

Bound by her rashness and steadfast religious convictions, Antigone buries her brother, Polyneices, despite Creon’s edict because she felt that it was not up to man to decide her fate. Antigone is strong enough to challenge the everpresent control of men. She presents her opinions, challenges authority, and does not believe in something merely because it is the word of the king. It is between her and the gods.

Even though Antigone is courageous and noble, she does not think her actions through. She does not care whether or not her decisions will affect the people around her. Antigone also has a martyr complex. Her selfishness is shown when she harshly refuses her sister’s request to share Antigone’s punishment with her. Antigone wants all the credit for saving Polyneices’ soul.

All these flaws are only traits of the human nature, and Antigone is merely a human. At the time of her impending death, she reveals her fatalistic nature, which at first is hidden beneath her pride and feministic convictions. She blames the curse that her father, Oedipus, has brought upon the family, and she laments on the “fact” that she has been destined to meet a tragic end from the time of her birth, when, in actuality, she has been the one to make the decision to bury Polyneices. Fearing a torturously slow death, she commits suicide.

In a Greek tragedy, one of the most important elements is hubris. During the course of the play, Antigone is supposed to overlook warning signs that tell her to sthop what she is doing and go back to the “correct” way. This does not happen for her. Unlike a tragic hero, she does not exhibit any recognition of her mistakes and misjudgements, nor is she humbled or enlightened at the end. Even though her death is quite unfortuante and preventable, it is not really a downfall since she knows that she is going to die all along. Pathos is what the audience feels for Antigone, but not to the extend to which one feels remorse or learns a moral lesson by it.

Creon, like Antigone, is also full of stubborn, foolish pride. Still, his decision in ordering the edict of putting anyone who buries Polyneices to death can be justified. He is only being loyal to his state, and his political and religious attitude is probably shared by many Thebans at the time. Creon’s flaw is the rigidity in his personality and a sense of insecurity and inadequacy that will not allow him to change the royal fiat.

Hubris is excessive or inordinate pride in oneself. Creon does not want to lose face and give into a woman, and he refuses to listen to the advice of the people hwo love him and whom he loves dearly, a flaw which will eventually lead to the devastating consequences he must endure. Despite all the warnings that the Sentry, Haimon, and Teiresias give him, he does not realize that he can be wrong and, in this case, is wrong.

Creon’s realization of his errors in punishing Antigone comes too late. He tries to make up for them by performing the burial rituals on Polyneices that Polyneices rightfully deserves according to their religious beliefs. But Antigone has already hung herself in her characteristic rashness and Haimon stabs himself too, in front of his father after trying to kill him. Creon then returns home only to find his wife dead by her own hands.

His life has crumbled apart and he cannot do anything about it. He must nowl ive his life condemning himself, fully aware that Antigone’s death is completely unnecessary, that his son has died, loathing him, and that his beloved dead wife has cursed him before he has killed herself. Creon, now alone as ever, is left with nothing but his overwhelming guilt and a newly gained wisdom. He now knows that he decree has dishonored the gods and his own family, and his accepts the punishment he feels he deserves for his folly.

Antigone is a noble character but she is not a tragic hero by definition. She does not recognize her flaws and has ended her life quickly. There is no find of any revelation in this play for Antigone. Creon fits the criteria of a tragic hero perfectly. His pride, lack of judgement, and unwillingness to bow to a woman have thrown him into complete disarray and despair. His paradox occurs when he tries to be a strong king. He attempts to use the significance of Polyneices’ death as a symbol of his strength and power over tyranny and treason. In doing so, he destroys the lives of those that he most cherishes. Creon is the one who falls from grace in this play, and at the end, he is humbled and enlightened by the tragedy. Therefore, Creon is the real tragic hero of Antigone.