Antigone Essay, Research Paper

Antigone

Sophocles’ trilogy of Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone is a powerful,

tragic tale that examines the nature of human guilt, fate and punishment. Creon, Oedipus’

uncle and brother-in-law, is the story’s most dynamic character. His character experiences a

drastic metamorphosis through the span of the three dramas. Creon’s vision of a monarch’s

proper role, his concept of and respect for justice, as well as his respect for the design evolve

considerably by the trilogy’s tragic conclusion.

In Oedipus the King (OK) , the audience is introduced to a Creon who seems to put loyalty to

the king above all. He sympathizes with the tragic plight of King Oedipus and asserts no

apparent ambition himself. His attitude toward the king is one of yielding and fulfilling

reverence. Creon’s notion of justice in OK stems directly from the divine. That which the gods

have decreed must become law. It pains Creon to have Oedipus exiled, but he must do so as

the gods have willed it. Creon’s respect for divinity and prophecy seems to be his defining trait

in OK. His attitude is one of unquestioning reverence.

In Oedipus at Colonus (OC), one sees the beginning of Creon’s decline. Creon has now

come to occupy the throne that once belonged to Oedipus. It soon becomes apparent that his

vision of the proper role of a king has changed to accommodate his new-found position. The

emphasis shifts from that of a king who must rule wisely to one who must rule unyieldingly.

The kingship becomes a selfserving instrument for Creon in his attempt to secure the return of

Oedipus and the good fortune prophesied to accompany him. Creon’s notion of justice is

severely distorted in OC. He becomes monomaniacal – conducting his affairs with tyranny and

belligerence. For example, he threatens to harm Oedipus’ daughters if the blind beggar does

not return to Thebes. His view of rightness and fairness is no longer in line with that of his

subjects. In OC, Creon still retains some respect for divine prophecies. These have after all

motivated his desire to return Oedipus to Thebes.

Antigone reveals the ultimate extent to which Creon’s character deteriorates. His

transformation completes itself; he has become an unreasonable tyrant. Creon can no longer be

called a king. He has become a despot. There is absolutely no justice to be found. Violence

and threats of violence are the tools by which he rules. For example, his senseless threats to an

innocent sentry reveal the true extent of his loss of reason. Creon has distorted the

proclamation against Polyneices’ burial, which was originally intended to foster Theban unity,

into a display of rashness and incompetence. There is no mention of the gods and their

intentions on Creon’s behalf in Antigone. He has been so far destroyed by his own power as

to dismiss the divine will that he originally thrived on.