

## Antigone

Sophocles was well-versed in Tragedy, and these days everyone in America is as well. We are discovering what it is to be vulnerable, what is it to feel suffering and torment, and how to let loose a flood of emotions. Not surprisingly, these are some of the major purposes and functions of a Greek Tragedy, according to Aristotle anyway. The citizens of Ancient Greece went to see these very plays, Antigone and Oedipus Rex that is, and learned life lessons, and why it is necessary to cleanse oneself of one's emotions; the same things we Americans are learning. There are many things that these two important plays have in common with the situation going on in America at this time.

First off, everyone has ~~misery~~. I have it, you have it, we ALL have it. I can think of many instances that are related to the "tragedy" in which America shows an immense amount of ~~misery~~. For one, so many Americans have begun to think that all Arabs and Muslims are out to get them. Hate crimes are many in areas where many followers of Islam live. On the news last night I watched a man describe how he was confronted by a gun-toting neighbor, and the man yelled that he was not a Muslim, even though he was wearing a turban, the sign of many Islamic men. It is a shame that he had to deny his religion for the sake of his life. That specifically relates to Antigone who would have been forced to go against her Gods and her ideology for the sake of her life. Another example of ~~misery~~ that comes to mind is the way many Americans think this country is invincible. We refuse to believe anything can happen to us because frankly, nothing has. We've carved out our little niche of the all-powerful country and we refuse to dig out of it. "NO," they say, "We cannot be bombed, we cannot experience any kind of terrorism. It will not happen." There are also some who think that war is the only way to retaliate, and that military retaliation is the only way to solve our problem. Now, I'm no diplomat, but I know that there must be other ways to solve this problem. If we go to war against a man and a few isolated groups of terrorists, it will be a big mistake. The Taliban is violently against the United States, and will use all of their power to win, which would be easy for them in a country like Afghanistan, a country Russia in its powerful era could not beat. Osama bin Laden is so good at hiding, we haven't been able to find him all this time, what makes us think we could kill him now? I know that for some, we must try, but we would be killing hundreds of innocent Afghan people (who do not support the Taliban) in the meantime. But I digress. ~~misery~~ can also be seen amongst the Americans who refuse to see the side of the issue from the Middle Eastern standpoint. Radical Muslims really have no reason to like us, and I for one, have wondered why something like this hasn't happened yet.

In Oedipus Rex one can easily see the fumes of ~~madness~~ rising from the Theban streets. When Oedipus refuses to see that it is himself making the women and dogs give birth to dead babies, that is ~~madness~~.

So shall you see me, as of right, with you, venging this country and the God together. Why, 'tis not for my neighbors' sake, but mine, I shall dispel this plague-spot; for the man, whoever it may be, who murdered him, lightly might hanker to serve me the same. I benefit myself in aiding him.

-Oedipus

He does not even realize that he is cursing himself. Oedipus also displays this tunnel-vision quality as Tiresias reluctantly tells him of the curse placed on him at birth. Oedipus automatically assumes that Creon and Tiresias have made a plan to kill him and steal his throne, or something to the like. The people are sore afraid of his anger, and the Old Man does not even want to tell Oedipus the story of his finding in the woods. Maybe you could say the Old Man had ~~madness~~, in that he could only think of not wanting to tell Oedipus the truth. The same truth that would leave either the city in decay, or Oedipus to stab out his own eyes. Jocasta displays the same virtues as her husband/son. She sees only that the Gods must be wrong, because she once had a son, and he did not come back and marry her. How dumb is this woman? But we must have hope, for she does eventually get the grand joke played on her family, and, of course, as tragedy dictates, she kills herself behind the curtain.

In the Tragedy of Antigone there are many who also are consumed by ~~madness~~. Antigone, of course, knows what she must do and buries the body of Polynices. She cannot see that there is any instance in which her uncle could be right. Creon is a barbarian to suggest that one should leave a body to rot and be eaten by animals, especially when he is of your blood. Ismene even displays a little tunnel-vision when she demands to be killed with Antigone. She refuses to live if her sister can't, even though she also refused to help that same sister bury her brother. "How could I live on alone, without my sister?" she questions Creon, pleading for him to let her die as well. Haemon also has a significant amount of ~~madness~~, saying he cannot be without Antigone. He tries to plead with his father first by using flattery, second by using calm, cool reasoning, and third by throwing a temper tantrum. Needless to say, none of them worked. And if they had, we wouldn't be reading a Tragedy, now would we? Haemon is one of my favorite characters, but in the end he's just another dead body for Creon to cry about. Creon is much like his son in his unbending will. He refuses to change his mind about the Eteocles/Polynices issue. He sends his own niece to a cave to die of starvation, and does not seem to care. It is not until Tiresias changes his mind that he thinks maybe he has done something wrong. The Creon of Oedipus Rex and the Creon of Antigone are two very different men.

Secondly, it seems that all the authorities never see tragedy coming until it knocks on their doors. America has had the strongest Armed Forces in the world for a long time, and we have learned to lean back and be lazy. We didn't think

anyone would ever attack us because of our strength. We know terrorism happens in other countries, we even go and make peace treaties, but we never thought that we'd be in this situation. Until now. And it's not like there haven't been signs; we're just too busy to even think about that possibility. Remember the truck bombings in United States embassies in Africa? Is it true that we thought those acts wouldn't hit closer to home? Is that why Bush wanted a huge missile defense system? Could this have been staged? A war makes a boom in economy, it is always an opportunity to show off your ability to strategize. If America won this war against terrorism George W. Bush would go down in history. But again, I digress. Another thing we were apparently not aware of, are the Osama bin Laden letters. Bin Laden wrote letters to certain political persons describing the ways he would best America. He stated that he would beat us, and he would show America a great tragedy. Did we simply ignore those letters?

In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus showed a great ignorance towards what was happening until it hit him, shall we say, right between the eyes. He could not believe he was "the" Oedipus of the curse, and also he did not buy into the Fisher King Myth, as I stated earlier. Oedipus also could not see that Creon did not want to be king of Thebes, and he went on and on and on about the ways Creon was going to steal his throne.

Neither am I, by nature, covetous to be a king, rather than play the king. Nor any man who has sagacity. Now I have all things, without fear, from you; reigned I myself, I must do much I hated. How were a throne, then, pleasanter for me than painless empire and authority?

-Creon

Creon wonders why in the Hell Oedipus would think he wanted his job when Creon had all the power, but less responsibility. Tiresias also sensed Oedipus' ignorance as he refused to tell his king the truth about his birth. I think that Tiresias was afraid of what Oedipus would do to him, because he had convinced himself that he was not the reason for Thebes' destruction.

The rulers in Antigone as well exhibit an inability to see what is surely about to happen. Creon does not at first believe that Antigone could have buried her brother. Even though he knows Antigone feels what could be love for her brother, and he knows of her passionate nature, he doesn't think she could have done it. Perhaps this is because he thinks a woman couldn't do something so bold, or maybe he doesn't see what is going on beneath his own roof, obviously he doesn't concern himself with the affairs of females. Creon also does not believe Haemon will kill himself. Reasons for this are numerous. Haemon seems to be an adolescent pitching a fit, he does not seem to truly love Antigone, and possibly Creon thinks Haemon would just not do it. "Die as she may, she shall not die alone," Haemon proclaims. And later: "My face thou shalt never behold again." One would think that if Haemon could get into Antigone's cave and try to kill himself, that they could also run away together, but apparently these thoughts do not run through the brains of those with amorous

intentions. Another thing Creon did not notice in all his running about trying to prevent anyone from burying his nephew are all the birds gorging on blood. Tiresias sees this however and informs his king. These birds, he says, are showing how humans act when they see blood and strife, they go crazy and begin killing one another, this is what is happening to Thebes. One last thing, Creon does not notice the outrage over the war and Antigone's confinement-death. The people are not pleased that Creon isn't allowing Polynices to be buried, and he better do something about it. Fortunately, he does, but it's just a leeeeeeeetle bit too late.

One last thing to comment on before you get tired of reading this. Everything has a moral to the story. From the chaos in the United States we should learn to always be on the alert. An entire country should never think it is invincible, we should never assume we are indestructible. From Oedipus Rex there are a few things to glean. One is to never let ~~forces~~ run your life; though it is impossible not to have some ~~forces~~, you can prevent it from dictating the way you act. It is important to remember that when Oedipus had eyes he could not see, and once he tore them out, he saw all the wrongness that he had built his life upon. And the question we should ponder in Antigone, is when it comes down to it, whose laws are you going to follow, the God's laws, or those of man?

There really are a lot of things that Oedipus Rex, Antigone, and the situation in America have in common. And I was expecting this paper to be short.