

Higher Level Essay: English A: Literature

How do Creon's poor character interactions within the play *Antigone* lead to his downfall?

The Downfall of Creon Revealed by the Character Interactions

Word Count: 1454

The various character interactions within any piece of literature are vital in helping to complete the story. Comparable to humans and animals of the natural world, healthy interactions are crucial in maintaining good relations and peace with one another. These encounters help display the conflict or internal struggle of certain characters to the audience by the expression of mood, behaviour, and how they interact with others. A conflict is created when encounters between certain characters become disordered, establish turmoil, and display a contrast in ideas, often leading to an argument and dissatisfaction in both parties. Miscommunication is a common occurrence that happens to everyone in regular day-to-day life. Often, the lack of understanding or inability to hold a different perspective is the cause of this misunderstanding between humans. This is the case in Sophocles' play, *Antigone*, which recounts the aftermath of the war on Thebes where the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, kill each other while fighting for control over the city. From this incident, a conflict arises on whether the body of Polynices should be buried or left to rot, as he was the one to invade the city, to which Creon, the new king of Thebes, decides on the latter. Within the play, the downfall of Creon is crafted through his poor interactions with other characters by exposing his inability to communicate information, setting aside his self-importance, and considering the perspectives of others.

Creon struggles to effectively send and receive information to his family members and messengers. This poor communication distances him from the outside world, creating confusion, misunderstandings, and unnecessary frustration with his family members and messengers. This is demonstrated when the Sentry informs Creon that the body of Polynices has been buried, despite his orders. The Sentry reports that "[t]here was no mark of a spade, no pickaxe there, / no earth turned up, the ground packed hard and dry, / unbroken, no tracks, no wheelruts, nothing" (Sophocles 282-285). The verbal repetition of 'no' emphasizes the lack of clues or indication

towards whoever is responsible for the act. Despite the Sentry making it apparent that the culprit is widely unknown, Creon furiously replies, “if you don’t find the man who buried that corpse, / the very man and produce him before my eyes, / simple death won’t be enough for you, / not till we string you up alive / and wring the immorality out of you” (345-350). Creon quickly assumes the culprit to be a man and uses a dismissive tone that reflects his power and authority as king while poorly interpreting the information given. Following the tragic death of their son, Haemon, who committed suicide, Creon’s lack of communication is further displayed by his wife, Eurydice. Being uninformed of the situation created by her husband, she orders the Leader to “[t]ell [her] the news, again, whatever it is... / [...] [she] can bear the worst” (1310-1312). After hearing the news, Eurydice proceeds to commit suicide out of anger and despair, indicating that the news was too much for her to handle. This poor lack of communication distances Creon from his wife and other characters, causing him to misunderstand the intended information from the Sentry, which ultimately leads to his downfall.

From these encounters, the arrogant behaviour of Creon is exposed through his self-importance and pride. This results in an absence of character interaction since nobody bothers to speak to him as he does not listen. After attempting to speak with Creon regarding the ruling of Antigone, Haemon grows frustrated over the arrogance and naivety of his father. As a result of Creon’s verdict, Antigone hangs herself in a noose and when Creon arrives at the shackles, Haemon “spat in his face, not a word in reply, / [...] suddenly leaning his full weight on the blade, / he buried it in his body, halfway to the hilt,” completely ignoring his father and disrespecting him before committing suicide (1360-1364). This decision from Haemon to ignore his father expresses his rage toward the situation. With limited understanding, Creon believes Haemon killed Antigone instead, reflecting his narrow-mindedness. After bearing the tragic

news of Haemon's death from the Leader, Eurydice commits suicide without even speaking to Creon. Being isolated from his family, Creon is informed of Eurydice's death by a Messenger as "[t]he queen is dead [...] / poor thing, her wounds are fresh" (1410-1412). The lack of Creon's interactions due to his self-importance distances him from his wife and causes her to be oblivious to the tragedy unfolding, immediately deciding to commit suicide after hearing the tragic news. Due to Creon's arrogance, two of his family members are dead from suicide due to his ruling over Antigone. Without a single word spoken to him, this sparks the downfall of Creon as his wife and heir to the throne are no longer alive.

With the punishment of Antigone being the central conflict of this play, Creon is given numerous opportunities to reconsider his judgement and correct his verdict. Despite receiving various perspectives on the situation, his naivety and inability to think logically render him unable to view and process these perspectives. This makes Creon narrow-minded, building his arrogant character and self-importance as king. During the dispute over the punishment of Antigone, Haemon wishes that she is released as he believes the law is foolish. However, Haemon is hesitant to challenge his father as he holds a position of high authority. As Haemon expresses his perspective and opinion, Creon begins to question his son's loyalty to him as he refuses to consider Haemon's perspective by saying, "[I]et him do— / dream up something desperate, past all human limit" to the Leader (862-863). This displays Creon's lack of wisdom and judgement as he views Haemon's perspective and advice to be delusional and chooses to fully disregard it while arguing with him instead of resolving the manner peacefully. The narrow-mindedness of Creon is shown yet again during a visit from Tiresias where he receives wise advice regarding his discipline of Antigone. Despite having a highly reputable record of never telling a lie to Thebes, Creon rejects the advice as he lacks the rational thinking and open-

mindedness to consider the sensible perspective of Tiresias. Afterwards, the Leader informs Creon that it is “good advice, / [...] take it now, you must” (1223). The Leader recommends for Creon to take the guidance, as any reasonable person would, which exposes his inability to accept the opinion of others. This reflects Creon’s stubbornness which is attributed to his naivety and narrow-mindedness as he is given advice and different viewpoints on multiple occasions about his sentencing of Antigone but continually refuses to re-evaluate his judgement. Creon’s inability to listen and consider the thoughts of the other characters demonstrates his poor ability to interact with them as he struggles to cooperate. This struggle results in the ruination of his relationships and reputation with the public, in addition to the death of his own family, which establishes his eventual downfall as king.

Throughout the play, the downfall of Creon is influenced by the naivety, narrow-mindedness, and arrogant characteristics that he possesses. This is revealed by the inadequate character interactions that he experiences with other characters in the play. Creon struggles to effectively acquire and transmit information with his messengers which generate unneeded confusion and misunderstandings. He fails to disclose the nature of his problematic situation to Eurydice, leaving her oblivious to the implications and possibility of correcting his judgement, and misinterprets the information being conveyed by the Sentry regarding the buried body by exhibiting a dismissive tone. The self-centeredness and lack of rational thinking found in Creon reflect his arrogance and naivety, resulting in his growing isolation as nobody is willing to speak to him. He fails to recognize the implications of his verdict on Antigone, thinking that Haemon murdered her instead of herself committing suicide, and as a result, his son and wife have both taken their lives without a word spoken to display their rage and despair toward Creon’s stubbornness. With Creon’s naivety and narrow-mindedness, he dismisses any advice given to

him as he refuses to challenge the morality of his judgement. The advice received by Tiresias and Haemon is immediately disposed of as he is incapable of considering their perspectives and reassessing his morals. From this, it is evident that the isolation brought upon Creon from his poor character interactions, due to his arrogance, naivety, and narrow-mindedness, crafts his downfall as everyone in his family is dead, leaving him with no heir to the throne. As this tragedy is fixated on the fatal flaws of Creon and his inability to challenge his morals, the same can be applied to Antigone. She also fails to have her morals challenged.

Work Cited

Sophocles. "Antigone." *The Three Theban Plays*. Trans. Robert Fagles. London: Penguin Classics, 1984.