Antigone Tragic Hero: Protagonists Antigone Versus Kreon

Sophocles offers his audience two protagonists: Antigone and Kreon. While reading Antigone, there is a divide on who to sympathize with. The amount of loss Kreon suffered as a result of a lack of flexibility, it is important to realize that it is just that: Kreon's own shortcomings. When choosing a position in the debate between whether sympathies lie with Kreon or Antigone, the main divide to analyze is religious devotion versus civic duties. In this essay, the paper will be discussing how Antigone, because of her devotion to family and her personal religious morals warrants her more sympathy for her tragic death.

Antigone warrants more sympathy from the audience because her rebellious acts came from a place of familial and religious devotion. Her loyalty to the gods and family resulted in her being disloyal to the king. Having a troubled and traumatic past also prompts pityness as well as sympathy towards Antigone from the start. She is able to recognize the fact that her well-being does not come before that of a self-righteous king. In the era this was written, everyone had a right to burial, no matter what he or she has done. It was an unwritten law of the gods, which Antigone thought justified her actions. Antigone is able to stick to the notion that the law of the gods outweighs civic laws made based on feelings of emotion like betrayal. By burying Polyneices, she feels she is doing her duty and respecting tradition. For instance, a quote from when Antigone tells her sister her plan to bury her brother Polyneices shows her religious devotion as well as the ability to stick to her morals: "To me it is fine to die performing such a deed. I will lie there, dear to him, with my dear friend, when I have performed this crime of piety; for I must please those down below a longer time than those up here, since I shall lie there always" (Ant. 21-22). Antigone faces a decision where she obeys Kreon and fear and she will anger the gods or commit the crime and face death. As soon as she buried her brother, she sealed her fate.

A major quality Antigone has is valiance. She expresses it in her act of defiance in burying her brother. To truly appreciate Antigone, it is necessary to dig deeper into the character. Femininity plays a huge role in her valiance. Antigone exhibits even more valiance and courage when she refuses to let her sister, Ismene take any of the blame for her actions: "ANTIGONE. Just save yourself; I do not begrudge you your escape. ISMENE. Wretch that I am! Must I miss sharing in your doom? ANTIGONE. You must; you made the choice to live, and I to die" (Ant. 42). At a time when female role models and heroines were scarcely seen, Antigone stepped up to fulfill this role. "Women in the ancient Greek world had few rights in comparison to male citizens. Unable to vote, own land, or inherit, a woman's place was in the home and her purpose in life was the rearing of children" (Cartwright, 2016). In Ancient Greece, it was a male-dominated culture, where women had no place of business with men. Sophocles painted Antigone as a powerful heroine. Her decisions were not irrational but were compassionate and brave. She makes her own decisions that chose her own destiny. She never allowed the King or anyone else to do it for her. That is heroism. Antigone says to Ismene "Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you. There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too" (Ant, 444-445). Antigone is continuously looking for honor and respect for her family and for the gods. She can also be seen as a heroine religiously. In Antigone's speech, "The dead man and the Gods who rule the dead know whose act this was. Words are not friends" (Ant, 435-436). Her courage and valiance is doing what is respectful to the Gods, making her a true heroine. Sophocles portrays

Antigone as a heroine to her family and to the gods throughout the play.

In some instances, there can be sympathy for Kreon. Even though he did not give Polyneices his burial rights, Kreon felt it was just because he marched on Thebes with his army, commiting treason. In order to prove his dominance action needed to be taken. Kreon felt he was doing the right thing by the gods when punishing Polyneices. Pity is found near the end of the play when Kreon discovers the errors of his ways. Kreon's wife and only son are dead and has no one to blame but himself. Is there a chance that Antigone would have accomplished more in opposition Kreon's misbehaviors and abuse of power if she had stuck around to fight him head on, instead of choosing to become a martyr? Kreon's actions come from a need to aid his feeling of lack of control. As a new leader, Kreon feels that the only way that he will be able to gain respect from his people is by upholding the decrees that he puts out, making no exceptions, not even for his own blood. This flaw is the driving force behind the conflict of the entire plot, and it is what causes the tragic end to the story. Kreon's ego could not even leave his mind long enough to grant an exception for his own flesh and blood. Kreon's excessive pride can be shown in his conversation with the leader of the chorus when speaking about Antigone's betrayal: "Never shall evil men be held In higher honor than the just, at least by me; But he who bears good will towards this city will Be honored by me equally in life and death" (Ant. 28-29). A great example of another character flaw that led to Kreon's demise and therefore lack of sympathy is his sexist tendancies throughout the plot. This not only further proves my claim about Kreon's downfalls, but further supports why Antigone was an important female role model and heroine of her time. In a male dominated culture, Antigone's actions are scrutinized even more than males. To prove this Kreon says, "from now on they will act like women. Tie them up, no more running loose" (Ant. 668). This quote expresses Kreon's opinion that women should not be able to speak and roam freely. To restrain women, would prevent chaos. His words mirror his constant paranoia about asserting dominance. This can be seen when he tries to find out who buried Polyneices. Kreon's low opinion of women is what leads him towards his downfall. His ignorance and insecurities causes his self-worth to deplete, making him a tragic hero as well. Antigone constantly arises to the challenge by questioning Kreon's authority, and fighting for equality in the name of true love and justice.

Throughout the play there are many apparent themes, the ability to choose a character with whom you sympathize with more is found in the reader's opinion on these themes. Although both characters deserve pity from the audience, Antigone is the more deserving character. For example, in the theme of religious devotion vs. civic duty, the audience can confide in the character, Antigone, for more religious devotion and sympathy towards others. Antigone can be fickle and irritable, her love for her family as well as respecting the gods is what led to her downfall. Kreon, on the other hand, shows none of his love until it is too late. He was the epitome of an autocratic ruler and heartless for turning on his family. In the theme of courage and what that truly means, the character Kreon, who agrees that sticking to your word even in the face of your own family will find Kreon to be a more relatable tragic hero.