

ANTIGONE

*Based on the tragedy by Sophocles
Adapted as a One-Act Play by Sanderson Beck*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Eteocles, Prince of Thebes (May be doubled)

Polyneices, Eteocles twin and his enemy (May be doubled)

Two Men, Men of Thebes (May be doubled)

Creon, King of Thebes

Antigone, Niece of Creon and sister of Eteocles and Polyneices

Ismene, Younger sister to Antigone

Sentry, Posted to guard the body of Polyneices

Theban Elders, charged with advising the king, may be men or women (The Chorus)

Haemon, Crown Prince, Son of Creon, Betrothed to Antigone

Tieresia(s), an elderly prophet(ess)

A Young Boy (or Maiden), apprentice to Tieresia(s)

Guards (May be doubled)

Prologue

MUSIC. OUTSIDE THE MAIN THEBAN GATE - DAY

Two actors in shadow enact the fall of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices.

Men of Thebes enter. Eteocles is carried away with full honors.

Creon enters the shadow play. He stops two men from carrying Polyneices away.

CREON

Leave him!!!

Polyneices is left behind on the battlefield. Lights dim.

Scene 1

EXT. GARDEN IN THEBES - DAY

Ismene is sitting on a bench, and Antigone walks up to her.

ANTIGONE

Dear Ismene, what more can we suffer?
Have you heard the latest edict proclaimed?

ISMENE

I've heard nothing, Antigone,
since we lost our brothers by a double blow,
and the Argive army went away.
What is it that bothers you so?

ANTIGONE

Creon will give one of our brothers
an honorable tomb, but the other none at all.
Eteocles has been buried with full honors,
but Polyneices' body lies unburied,
and none may bury him nor mourn.
His corpse will be a feast for the vultures.
Creon gives such orders to you and me.
Anyone who dares attempt a funeral
will be stoned by the people of Thebes.
So that's what it is,
and soon you'll show if you are noble.

ISMENE

But sister, what can I do?

ANTIGONE

Think about sharing my work in this action.

ISMENE

Would you risk it?
What do you intend to do?

ANTIGONE

Will you pick up the corpse with me?

ISMENE

Do you mean to bury him against the law?

ANTIGONE

He's my brother and yours,
though you may wish he weren't.
I won't be disloyal to him.

ISMENE

This is hard, when Creon commanded against it.

ANTIGONE

He has no right to keep me from my brother.

ISMENE

Remember how our father destroyed his eyes
and then our mother took her life.
Now both our brothers are dead in one day.
Look at the two of us here alone.
We'll die miserably too if we break the law
and try to cross the royal power.
Remember we are women and don't fight men.
Since we are subjects of their strong power,
we must listen to these orders.
I shall ask of their spirits forgiveness,
for I am forced to obey the men in power.
A wild and futile action makes no sense to me.

ANTIGONE

I won't urge you.
Now even if you wanted to,
I wouldn't accept you as a partner.
Do what you want,
but I shall bury that man.
If I die for it, that is best.
I shall rest with the one I loved,
when I've committed the crime of piety.
For longer will I be with the dead
than with the living.
After death is forever.
You choose to live,
but dishonor the holy laws of the gods.

ISMENE

I'll do no dishonor,
but I can't act against the city.

ANTIGONE

That's your excuse.
I go to pile earth on the brother I love.

ISMENE

Sister, I'm afraid for you.

ANTIGONE

Don't worry about me.
Put your own life in order.

ISMENE

At least tell me your plan.
Keep it hidden, and I'll do so too.

ANTIGONE

No, denounce me and proclaim it to the world.
I'd hate you more if you're silent.

ISMENE

Your heart is hot for actions that chill the blood.

ANTIGONE

I know I please those whom I should please.

ISMENE

If you can, but you will try in vain.

ANTIGONE

When my strength fails, then I'll quit.

ISMENE

A hopeless task should never be attempted.

ANTIGONE

If that's what you say, I hate you,
and the dead will hate you forever too.
Leave me to my own folly
to suffer the worst that can happen,
but I'll not have a shameful death.

ISMENE

Go, Antigone, if you must;
but remember, even though your act is foolish,
you are loved by your loved ones.

Ismene hugs Antigone, and then Antigone goes off.

Scene 2

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MAIN THEBAN GATE - DAY

Antigone is placing some flowers on the corpse of Polyneices. Then she pours some libations and sprinkles dirt from an urn on the bloody corpse.

Scene 3

INT. THEBAN PALACE - DAY

Creon speaks to the THEBAN ELDERS.

CREON

Elders of Thebes, our city has suffered a storm,
but the gods have steadied us in safety.
When Laius died, I helped my sister rule
until Oedipus came to save our city.
Seeing his fate he blinded himself,
and once again I ruled in Thebes
until his two sons came of age.
Now they've killed each other in bitter strife,
and once again the sovereignty falls on me.
No one's soul and mind can be truly known
until he is tested in the practice of government.
When someone controls the state
and does not work for the best of all,
but locks up his tongue in fear,
I consider such a man the worst.
So I have sworn not to be silent
if I saw ruin not safety coming toward us.
I cannot count our city's enemy a friend of mine,
for only when our country is secure
is friendship even possible.
Such laws guard the greatness of our city.
Thus have I proclaimed to all
concerning the two sons of Oedipus:
Eteocles, who fell in our defense,
has been entombed with every honor;
but Polyneices, who came from exile
to destroy our city and drink his family's blood,
trying to enslave us by force of arms,
no one shall mourn nor honor with burial,
his corpse left to be devoured by birds and dogs.
I'll never honor the wicked and reject the just.
Whoever loves this city
will be rewarded in life and death.

THEBAN ELDERS

Creon, you've made your judgment,
and your command is law.

CREON

Sentries have been posted to guard the body.

A SENTRY comes in.

THEBAN ELDERS

Here comes one of them now.

SENTRY

My king, I'm not eager to give this report,
but the lot fell to me, and I must bear it.

CREON

What's the matter?

SENTRY

First let me say I didn't do it,
nor did I see who did.

CREON

Do what? Tell us.

SENTRY

Someone has buried the body.
Just now they sprinkled dirt on it and left.

CREON

Who has dared to do this?

SENTRY

I don't know.

There's no sign of a shovel or pick or wheels.
No tracks of any animal were found.
The body had a light coat of dust
as though a pious hand had scattered it.
Our company discussed the matter,
and I drew the lot to make the report.

THEBAN ELDERS

As he spoke, I wondered
if this could be the work of the gods.

CREON

Keep quiet, before you make me mad.
Why would the gods cover him

who came to burn our temples?
Do you think the gods honor the wicked?
Yet I've heard some citizens
muttering against this edict,
shaking their heads in secret instead of obeying.
They must have bribed the guards to bury him.
Nothing is worse than money to waste states;
it perverts honesty to works of shame.
But those who got paid for this will have to pay.
You, sentry, must find the man who did this
and bring him here to me, or you will die.

SENTRY

Do I offend your hearing or your mind?
The criminal hurts your mind; I hurt your ears.
I'm not guilty, but you've misjudged me.

CREON

You may be clever about judging,
but you'll be sorry if you don't find the criminal.

SENTRY

Finding would be the best thing,
but I'm glad just to have escaped.

The sentry goes out.

Scene 4

EXT. OUTSIDE THEBAN GATE - DAY

The sentries remove the dirt from the corpse while suffering from the smell. Then they take a position upwind away from it in order to watch. Antigone approaches with a pitcher and an urn. Once again she pours a libation and sprinkles dirt on the corpse. The sentries come forward.

SENTRY

Stop that; don't you know it's forbidden?

ANTIGONE

Decent burial is not forbidden by the gods.

SENTRY

So do you admit you are ritually burying him?

ANTIGONE

I will not deny what is right.

SENTRY

Then you must come along with us to Creon.

ANTIGONE

I gladly go to challenge the one
who forbids us to do what is holy.

Scene 5

INT. THEBAN PALACE - DAY

Creon is on his throne, and the elders are present, when the sentry brings in Antigone.

THEBAN ELDERS

Look, it is Antigone.
The daughter of Oedipus is under arrest.

SENTRY

She did it. Where is the king?
We caught this girl burying the body.

CREON

Is this the girl you caught? Where was she?

SENTRY

She was burying the dead body; I saw her.

CREON

You, Antigone, stop looking at the ground
and tell me whether you did this or not.

ANTIGONE

Yes, I admit it; I don't deny it.

Creon speaks to the sentry.

CREON

You're free to go;
the charge against you is dropped.

SENTRY

I thank the gods.

The sentry goes out.

CREON

Now you answer this question briefly.
Did you know there was a law forbidding this?

ANTIGONE

Of course I knew; it was publicly proclaimed.

CREON

And yet you dared to disobey the law?

ANTIGONE

Yes, for this law was not proclaimed by Zeus
nor by any other of the gods.

I don't believe your edicts are able
to override the laws of heaven.

Unwritten laws belong to all time,
and no one knows when they began.

If I transgressed these laws
out of fear of the arrogance of men,
how could I satisfy the gods?

I know I'm mortal and will die
regardless of your proclamations.

If I must die before my time,
that may be a blessing.

To one who lives in sorrow as I do,
death can be a gain.

To me death is just a small pain.

But to leave my brother's body unburied
would be a bitter grief for me.

If you think my act is foolish,
it may be because a fool sees folly.

THEBAN ELDERS

She is as stubborn as her father
and will not yield to trouble.

CREON

The rigid are the first to break.

An unruly horse can be curbed to obey.

How can you, a slave, be so proud?

She was brought up to be insolent,
and now that she's defied the law she boasts.

If her triumph goes unpunished,

she is the man here not me.
Even if she were more than my niece,
she would not escape a dreadful death.
Nor will her sister Ismene;
she must have had a hand in it.
Go bring her here; I just saw her raving.

A guard goes out.

CREON (Cont'd.)
Even traitors who plot in secret
eventually betray themselves.
but hateful are the criminals
who when caught glory in their crimes.

ANTIGONE
Now that you have caught me,
will you do more than kill me?

CREON
No, that will be satisfactory.

ANTIGONE
Then why delay?
Everything you've said I hate.
And you hate what I say.
How could I have won any greater honor
than by burying my brother?
Everyone here would give their approval
if fear did not seal their lips.
But as a king blessed with power
you can do and say whatever you wish.

CREON
None of these Thebans agrees with you.

ANTIGONE
Yes, they do, but they control their tongues.

CREON
Aren't you ashamed to act without their help?

ANTIGONE
I'm not ashamed to honor my brother.

CREON

But he killed another brother of yours.
Honor to one outrages the other.

ANTIGONE

Eteocles will not believe himself dishonored.
It was his brother, not a slave, who died.

CREON

But one who attacked the land he defended?

ANTIGONE

The gods' laws are equal for the dead.

CREON

Do the just like having the unjust as equals?

ANTIGONE

Who knows what is holy in the next world?

CREON

Even there an enemy is not a friend.

ANTIGONE

My nature is not to hate but to love.

CREON

Then go to the dead and love them.
While I live, no woman will rule me.

Ismene comes in while crying.

THEBAN ELDERS

Look how Ismene comes weeping.

CREON

You viper hiding in my own house
sucking my blood in secret,
while I raised two subversives.
Do you confess your part in this burial?

ISMENE

If she will recognize my right to say it,
I will share in the action and the blame.

ANTIGONE

No, that would not be just.
You did not want to do it,
and I never let you.

ISMENE

In your trouble, Antigone,
I'm not ashamed to stand by you.

ANTIGONE

The dead know who did it.
I can't love a friend whose love is only words.

ISMENE

Don't reject me, sister.
Let me die with you and honor the dead.

ANTIGONE

No, you shall not die with me nor claim the deed.
My death will be enough.

ISMENE

When you are gone, what happiness can I find?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon; he's the one you care about.

ISMENE

What do you gain by taunting me?

ANTIGONE

I don't; it hurts me to taunt you.

ISMENE

Tell me how I can help you?

ANTIGONE

Protect yourself; I don't envy you.

ISMENE

Then I won't share your fate.

ANTIGONE

That's because you chose life, and I chose death.

ISMENE

At least I warned you.

ANTIGONE

Some approve your way; others prefer mine.

ISMENE

Yet I am blamed and ruined too.

ANTIGONE

Have courage and live.

I died long ago
when I gave myself to help the dead.

CREON

One of these girls has just lost her senses;
the other has always been a fool.

ISMENE

We cannot always reason clearly
when suffering confuses and clouds our mind.

CREON

You choose confusion when you join her wrong.

ISMENE

How could I live without my sister?

CREON

Don't mention her; she is dead.

ISMENE

Then will you kill your son's chosen bride?

CREON

Yes. He can plow other furrows.

ISMENE

He'll never find such an enduring love.

CREON

I don't choose wicked wives for my sons.

ISMENE

Poor Haemon, whose father wrongs him!

CREON

Let me hear no more of that marriage!

ISMENE

Will you take your son's bride away from him?

CREON

Death will put a stop to that marriage.

THEBAN ELDER

Are you determined that she must die?

CREON

Yes, and you have concurred in my sentence.

Take them inside;

they are women now and have no liberty.

The bold may try to escape

when they see death approaching.

Antigone and Ismene go out under guard.

THEBAN ELDER

Blessed is the life that knows no evil,

for the gods can strike down an entire family.

Not much is left now for the house of Laius.

But here comes Haemon, your son.

Has his heart been made heavy

by the sentence passed on his bride Antigone?

Haemon comes in.

CREON

We'll soon know better than seers could tell us.

My son, Antigone has been condemned to death.

Do you come here in anger for her fate?

or do you love me and support my action?

HAEMON

Father, I am your son and follow your path.

A marriage is not more important

than being guided by your wisdom.

CREON

Yes, Haemon, this should be the law for you.
Always obey your father's will.
Do not be lured by pleasure
to unseat your reason for a woman.
No wound is worse than a wicked wife.
Turn from this girl as an enemy
and let her find a husband in the world below.
I've found her openly rebelling.
Therefore I will have her killed.
If I permit disloyalty in my own house,
disorder will soon break out elsewhere.
I must be as just with my family
as I am with the whole state.
I cannot pardon violation of my laws
by one who would dictate to the ruler.
For the ruler of the city must be obeyed
in everything great or small, right or wrong;
but disobedience is the worst evil,
for it is what ruins the state,
confuses the people, and breaks up allies.
Most find contentment and safety in obeying.
Thus we must support the law
and not let ourselves be beaten by a woman.

THEBAN ELDERS

I am old, but I think you've spoken wisely.

HAEMON

Father, the gods gave us reason, best of all.
I'm not skilled in showing
where you've spoken wrongly.
Yet it's my duty to notice what people say,
for they're frightened of you and say little.
Murmurs in secret lament for her,
saying no woman ever less deserved
to die so shamefully
for actions so admirable.
For she would not let her brother's body
lie unburied to be eaten by dogs or birds.
Does not such a woman deserve a reward?
I've heard this rumor spreading quietly.
Father, I value your welfare above all.
Don't think your word alone must be correct.
Whoever believes that only he is right

may be found empty when he is tested.
The wise are not ashamed to learn
and take care not to be too rigid.
Let go of your resentment;
allow yourself to change.
Though I'm younger, my advice may be sound.

THEBAN ELDER

If your son has spoken well, pay attention.
And Haemon, benefit from his words.
You both have spoken reasonably.

CREON

At my age am I to be taught how to behave
by one as young as he?

HAEMON

I urge you not to do wrong.
Judge me by my actions not my age.

CREON

Have you done well to honor a rebel?

HAEMON

I don't respect those who do wrong.

CREON

You don't think she is sick with that disease?

HAEMON

The citizens deny it.

CREON

Does Thebes order me how to rule?

HAEMON

Now you speak like one who is immature.

CREON

Am I to rule by another's judgment?

HAEMON

No city belongs to one man.

CREON
Custom gives it to the ruler.

HAEMON
You'd rule a desert well.

CREON
He seems to be on the woman's side.

HAEMON
... if you are a woman. I care about you.

CREON
You're not ashamed to quarrel with your father?

HAEMON
I must when I see you acting unjustly.

CREON
Am I unjust to respect my position?

HAEMON
Respect?!
You trample on religious obligations.

CREON
It's infamous to yield to a woman!

HAEMON
But I don't yield to something shameful.

CREON
Everything you say is for her.

HAEMON
And for you and me and the gods.

CREON
You shall not marry her in this life.

HAEMON
If she dies, it will not be alone.

CREON
Has it come to this?
Do you threaten me?

HAEMON
It's no threat, but your decree is useless.

CREON
You'll regret trying to teach me wisdom.

HAEMON
If you weren't my father,
I'd call you mad.

CREON
Don't flatter me, you woman's slave.

HAEMON
You like to make speeches,
but you don't listen.

CREON
Oh? By the gods you'll pay for taunting me.

Creon turns to a guard.

CREON (Cont'd.)
Bring out that hated thing.
She shall die now
in front of him, her bridegroom.

HAEMON
No, you don't, not in front of me.
You will never see my face again.
Rage on to anyone who will listen.

Haemon goes out.

THEBAN ELDERS
He's gone, propelled by his anger.
The young in agony can be fierce.

CREON
Let him go and do more than man can do.
These two girls are doomed.

THEBAN ELDERS

Do you intend to execute them both?

CREON

No, you're right, not the innocent one.

THEBAN ELDERS

But the other? How is she to die?

Antigone comes in under guard.

CREON

Take her and hide her in a cave
with just enough food to appease the gods
so the city will not be stained with guilt.
Hades, the only god she worships,
may hear her prayers and save her,
or else she'll learn at last too late
it's useless work to worship the dead.
There let her choose death or a buried life
exiled from light and life in her tomb.

THEBAN ELDERS

Now I'm moved and can't control my tears
when I see the bride Antigone
at the door of death.

ANTIGONE

Thebans, you see me go on my last journey
to live in a place for corpses still an alien.
Unwed and without a friend I go where
I'll no longer see the holy light of the sun.
Losing a husband I might find another;
I could have other children;
but parents and brothers can never be replaced.
Whose help can I call upon
when for piety I'm called impious.
If my judge is wrong,
may his fate be no worse than mine.

CREON

Still she rages on.
The guards will regret it
if they don't get moving.

ANTIGONE

With that word I come close to death.

CREON

You can't hope to be freed now;

Your doom is decreed.

ANTIGONE

O Thebes!

Now they snatch me away without pity.

You elders, look at the last of your royal house

and the one who dooms me to suffer
for having respected the laws of heaven.

CREON

Away with her!

Two guards take Antigone out.

THEBAN ELDERS

Terrible is the power of fate
which no one can escape by wealth or war.

Blind TEIRESIAS comes in guided by a BOY.

CREON

Teiresias, what news brings you here?

TEIRESIAS

I'll tell you, and pay attention to the prophet.

CREON

I've always listened to your counsel.

TEIRESIAS

Thus you keep Thebes on a steady course.

CREON

I admit your advice has been helpful.

TEIRESIAS

But now you stand on the brink of ruin.

CREON

I shudder at your words. What is it?

TEIRESIAS

Bad omens from the gods are all around.
Your edict brings suffering on the city,
for every altar has been defiled
as birds and dogs have brought the carrion
from the corpse of fallen Polyneices.
So, my son, consider what has happened.
Everyone makes errors but once made
whoever gives up one's inflexible position
and corrects the wrong is not unwise.
Stubborn self-will brings on folly.
Give the fallen the honor he deserves.
Why do you kill the dead a second time?
You've confused this world and the next
by burying the living
while leaving the dead unburied.
I speak for your own good, and I'm right.
Learning from a wise counselor is not painful
when the advice he gives is valuable.

CREON

Old man, your arrows miss me.
I've used the trade of seers;
money is all they're after.
I tell you that man shall not be buried
even if eagles bore his carrion to Zeus.
Even that pollution would not convince me
to let his body be buried,
for no mortal can defile the gods.
When clever prophets plead a shameful case,
I know they're hoping to profit.

TEIRESIAS

Do people understand or even consider--

CREON

What? Surely some platitude is coming.

TEIRESIAS

How much more value prudence has than wealth.

CREON

... and how lack of it is the worst.

TEIRESIAS

Yet you are sick with that same disease.

CREON

I refrain from taunting a seer.

TEIRESIAS

But you did, when you said I lied.

CREON

All the seers are mercenaries.

TEIRESIAS

And all the tyrants lust after wealth.

CREON

Do you realize you're talking to a king?

TEIRESIAS

I know it, for I helped you save Thebes.

CREON

You're a wise seer, but you love evil deeds.

TEIRESIAS

You'll goad me to reveal my secret.

CREON

Do so, but don't speak for profit.

TEIRESIAS

There's no profit in my words for you.

CREON

How can you earn your pay?

I won't change.

TEIRESIAS

Then know this:

before a few days pass

you will give as payment to the dead

your own dead flesh and blood.

For you put a living soul in a dark tomb,
imprisoning her without pity,
while a corpse belonging to the world below
you keep unpurified, unburied, unrevered.
You've offended the gods of the dead,
and now avengers are coming after you.
Do you still think I've been bribed?
Soon the wailing will be in your house.
Hatred of you shakes the city.
You called me a bowman; I send my shafts
and now you'll feel the wound.
Boy, take me home now,
and let him rage at younger men
and learn to calm his tongue
and keep a finer temper than now he does.

The boy leads Teiresias out.

THEBAN ELDERS

Look, he goes. What terrible prophecies!
Since my hair first turned gray,
his words have been true for Thebes.

CREON

I know it too, and it bothers me.
It's hard to yield;
but to stand against him
and bring a curse upon my pride is bitter.

THEBAN ELDERS

You must listen to him and take his advice.

CREON

What should I do? Tell me, and I'll obey.

THEBAN ELDERS

Go free the girl from her cave
and make a tomb for the unburied dead.

CREON

Is that your advice? that I should yield?

THEBAN ELDERS

Yes, as soon as possible.
The gods swiftly ruin the misguided.

CREON

It's hard to change,
but I let go of my resolve and obey.
I can't fight against it anymore.

THEBAN ELDERS

Go yourself; don't leave it to anyone else.

CREON

I'll go at once. Guards, to your work.
Bring your axes and go quickly.
I imprisoned her, and I will set her free.
My heart feels misgivings;
it's better not to break established laws.

Creon and the guards go out quickly.

Scene 6

EXT. THE CAVE OUTSIDE THEBES - DAY

The large boulders blocking the opening of the cave have been moved enough for one person to pass through, as the guards and Creon approach.

CREON

Look, someone has already gotten in.

HAEMON (within)

Oh, my love!

CREON

That is Haemon's voice I hear.
Let me go in first.
Bring a torch in after me.

Creon climbs through the narrow opening.

INT. CAVE - MOSTLY DARK

Haemon has discovered Antigone hanging by her veil and uses his sword to cut her down.

HAEMON

O gods, this should have been my wife!
If it hadn't been for my father--

Haemon then notices Creon in the cave coming toward him soon followed by a guard with a torch.

CREON

My son, my son, what have you done?

HAEMON

What have I done?!

It's what you've done.

CREON

What are you thinking of?

What has driven you out of your mind?

Son, come away now; I beg you.

Haemon glares at Creon in fury and then spits in his face. He looks down for his sword, but as he picks it up, Creon retreats. Haemon swings his sword at Creon but cannot reach him. As Creon gets near the entrance to the cave, the guard with the torch comes in between them. Haemon seeing the guard protecting Creon stabs himself in the stomach, then stumbles back to the body of Antigone; falling he embraces her body with his remaining strength until blood spills out of his mouth onto her cheek, as he dies. The guard with the torch and Creon slowly approach the two dead bodies.

CREON

Hades, who receives all in death,
you have destroyed me now.

This is my guilt;
it's clear I killed you both.

-END-