

ANTIGONE

*Based on the tragedy by Sophocles
Adapted by Sanderson Beck*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Eteocles, Prince of Thebes (May be doubled)

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

Two Men (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

Elder #1, Elder #2, Elder #3, charged with advising the king, may be men or women

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

Tieresia, an elderly prophetess

A Young Boy (or Maiden), apprentice to Tieresia

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

EXTERIOR 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 are all that is left. Must we
add our deaths to those who died before us?
We are women! We don't fight men.
Let us obey Creon's edict and live.
Must every one of us destroy ourselves?
This wild and futile action makes no sense to me.

ANTIGONE

The very thing that holds you back, urges me on. Why should we cling to this cursed life?
We are here for a few breaths, and then death collects us. How could you stand the shame

if you arrived at Hades' realm and Polyneices were not there! Should we linger here a few more miserable years and then feel his loss for eternity?

ISMENE

I want to do justice for Polyneices. I want to mourn over both our brothers' graves! But if they discover us, we will not be allowed our quiet prayers. They will uncover his body, and we will die for nothing!

ANTIGONE

You must choose: Either oppose injustice or accept it. If we do not act against this abomination, we endorse it. Even if we fail, what we attempt means something. I cannot answer for you, but I will go to spread earth on my brother.

ISMENE

Misery has been our companion for so long. Now you embrace it like a lover.

ANTIGONE

Stay behind then, sister. What I embrace is my obligation to family and the gods. My duty is clear.

ISMENE

At least take care. Tell no one. I will keep your secret.

ANTIGONE

I will not sneak like a thief. Go shout my deeds. Silence in the face of such depravity is hateful to me, and you will be hateful too if you cower before tyranny.

ISMENE

Your passion makes you reckless. I fear for you, Antigone.

ANTIGONE

Fear for Creon. It is he who thwarts the will of the gods.

ISMENE

But what if the only result of this is that Polyneices and you both lay unburied? Will you be satisfied to have both your spirits wander?
A hopeless task should never be attempted.

ANTIGONE

I will do what I must. I would rather die today than live a coward's life and suffer for eternity.

ISMENE

I want to go with you, Antigone. How right it would feel to bury our brother! But I can't act against the city, even if I must bear the disgrace in your eyes. Know my sister though your act is foolish, you are loved yet and will always be.

Ismene hugs Antigone, and then Antigone goes off.

Scene 2

OUTSIDE THE MAIN THEBAN GATE - DAY

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

Scene 3

IN THE 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 ELDER #1

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 ELDER #2

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.

We argued until one voice spoke

the words that bowed us to the ground like quivering reeds: "King Creon must be told."

And it was I drew the lot to bear the bad news.

THEBAN ELDER #3

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

CREON

Have you no more wits than this guard?

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.

They must have bribed the guards to bury him.

A sack of gold is more powerful than a thousand swords when it causes steady men to retreat their
oaths. Evil has power, and it must be opposed.

You, sentry, must find the man who did this

and bring him here to me, or you will pay with your life.

SENTRY

Do I offend your hearing or your mind?
I hurt your ears. The criminal hurts your mind;
I am innocent, judge me not guilty of this crime.

CREON

You judge riches more sweet than duty. Except that you find who carried out this lawless burial, I will teach you the true reward of greed.

Creon goes out

SENTRY

Well may he be found! But, be he caught or be he not, truly you will not see me here again, I'm glad just to have escaped with my neck. I'd be a fool to risk fate twice!

The sentry goes out.

Scene 4

OUTSIDE THEBAN GATE - DAY

In shadow 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

IN THE THEBAN PALACE - DAY

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

THEBAN ELDER #3

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?

CREON
Do you know what you are saying? You accuse a daughter of the House of Laius?

SENTRY
I accuse nothing. I just tell you what I saw. She was burying the dead body.

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
How could I not? Are you more high than Zeus? Your mortal breath cannot overrule the laws of Heaven. Their jurisdiction is forever. Should I prefer your laws, I provoke the wrath of Hades and doom my brother's soul to wander. I knew that I must die. Had you not proclaimed it? Yet when one lives surrounded by sorrow, death is bliss.
To leave my brother unburied, I would rather be dead. If you judge me foolish in this, it may be you are the fool.

THEBAN ELDER #1
She is as stubborn as her father

and will not yield to trouble.

CREON

Enough! Stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire, she glories in her wickedness. If she can flout the law unpunished, then she is the man and I am the girl. Ismene must have had a hand in it. Go bring her here; I saw her in the palace, frenzied and distraught.

A guard goes out.

CREON (Cont'd.)

Even traitors who plot in secret eventually betray themselves. Go all. I would have a word alone with my sister's child.

(Exit Elders.)

ANTIGONE

Would you do more, Uncle, than execute me?

CREON

It is because I do not wish to see you die that I sent the others away. And Haemon means to marry you. I do not care to disappoint my son, either.

ANTIGONE

Perhaps your law is not so absolute.

CREON

Perhaps you are not so stubborn when there is no audience.

ANTIGONE

What will you have of me, Uncle?

CREON

You must condemn your crime publicly and stay away from your brother's body.

ANTIGONE

I cannot sacrifice his soul for my life!
What greater honor is there than 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.

CREON

Polyneices died our enemy.

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 girl will rule me.

The Elders return. Ismene comes in weeping.

THEBAN ELDER #2

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

I have done the deed. I share the guilt.

ANTIGONE

Justice will not have this. You would not consent to the deed when I asked your help.

ISMENE

But you are my last love. I walked with you as we tended our blind and beaten father. I will not abandon you now.

ANTIGONE

Whose deed this was, Hades and the dead know well.

ISMENE

Do not scorn me. Let me die with you, and honor the dead.

ANTIGONE

You cannot share in a deed already done.
Have courage and live. Live and remember me.
I died when I gave myself to help the dead.

CREON

Save yourself, Ismene. Your sister refuses to show the wit for self-survival.

ISMENE

When such misfortune comes, even the wisest lose their mother wit.

CREON

It takes not much wisdom to see how to stay alive. You choose confusion when you join her wrong.

ISMENE

Then will you kill your son's chosen bride?

CREON

He can plow other furrows.

ISMENE

He'll never find such an enduring love.

CREON

Let me hear no more of that marriage! She cannot be Death's handmaiden and Haemon's wife.

THEBAN ELDER #2

Must you deprive your son of his bride?

CREON

What would you have me do?

THEBAN ELDER #2

Let her repent and live.

CREON

Ask her yourself. She stands convicted and unrepentant, by her own mouth.

THEBAN ELDER #2

Antigone, your gracious King asks you to repent. Will you not save your own life?

ANTIGONE

I would that I could. I cannot live at the expense of my brother's soul.

CREON

You hear with your own ears.

To the guards

Delay no more. Take them within and guard them.

Even the bravest try to escape when

Death draws near.

Antigone and Ismene go out under guard.

THEBAN ELDER #3

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.

THEBAN ELDER #2

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 ELDER #1

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 #3

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 to reason.

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 ELDER #2

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 ELDER #3

Do you intend to execute them both?

CREON

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

THEBAN ELDER #1

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 ELDER #3

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.
I smell baking bread on a nearby hearth. Far off I hear children playing. All this to be shut away. No
breeze, no light, no sounds but my
own sobs. No aroma but damp rock. The
richness of this life breaks my heart.
Oh, that piety should be
deemed criminal. But if my judge is wrong,
may his fate be no worse than mine.

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 ELDER #1

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

Blind TEIRESIA comes in guided by a Young Boy or Maiden.

CREON

Teiresia, what news brings you here?

TEIRESIA

I'll tell you, now heed this prophesy.

CREON

I've always listened to your counsel.

TEIRESIA

Thus you keep Thebes on a steady course.

CREON

I admit your advice has been helpful.

TEIRESIA

But now you stand on the brink of ruin.

CREON

I shudder at your words. What is it?

TEIRESIA

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, Creon.

Learning from an old woman is not painful
when the advice she gives is valuable.

CREON

Old woman, 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 a clever prophetess pleads a shameful case, I know they're hoping to gain.

TEIRESIA

Do people understand or even consider--

CREON

What? Surely some platitude is coming.

TEIRESIA

How much more value prudence has than wealth.

CREON

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

TEIRESIA

Yet you are sick with that same disease.

CREON

I refrain from taunting a seer.

TEIRESIA

But you did, when you said I lied.

CREON

All the seers are mercenaries.

TEIRESIA

And all the tyrants lust after wealth.

CREON

Do you realize you're talking to a king?

TEIRESIA

I know it, for it was I helped you save Thebes.

CREON

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

TEIRESIA

You'll goad me to reveal my secret.

CREON

Do so, but don't speak for profit.

TEIRESIA

There's no profit in my words for you.

CREON

How can you earn your pay?

I won't change.

TEIRESIA

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 an archer; I send my shafts

and now you'll feel the wound.

To the Boy (Maiden)

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 (maiden) Leads Teiresia out.

THEBAN ELDER #2

Look, she goes. What terrible prophecies!

Since my hair first turned gray,

her words have been true for Thebes.

CREON

I know it too, and it unsettles the very ground beneath my feet. I remember now the screams of Oedipus: His bloody face, his eyes gouged out with my sister's brooch, by his own hand. The obstinate soul who fights with Fate suffers beyond the tolerance of man.

THEBAN ELDER #1

You must listen to her and take her advice.

CREON

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

THEBAN ELDER #3

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

CREON

You would have me yield?

THEBAN ELDER #2

The wise ship's pilot realigns his course when the storm comes. No man sees this as
weakness.

CREON

How reluctant I have been to change my resolve. I should look like a fool to reverse my very first
command as king. My enemies will see the weakness.

THEBAN ELDER #1

The gods swiftly ruin the misguided.

CREON

It's hard, but I let go of my resolve and obey.

Only a fool battles Fate.

THEBAN ELDER #1

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

ABOVE 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 stolen 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. The interior of the cave is revealed. Inside 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

CREON *Yelling*

Haemon!

Haemon stumbles back to the body of Antigone; falling he embraces her body with his remaining strength and 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.
I am utterly pitiable and alone.
This is my guilt;
I have killed you both.

MUSIC. *Lights Fade Out.*