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ANTIGONE

By Sophocles

Freely adapted by
EMILY MANN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(ANTIGONE)

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The Gersh Agency, 41 Madison Ave., 33rd Floor,
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ISBN: 1-58342-378-8

Dedicated to and inspired by Robert Fagles

* * * *

“In the great tragedies, protagonist and antagonist are both right and both wrong.”

(Robert Fagles by way of Hegel)

“If your only tool is a hammer, you treat every problem as if it were a nail.”

(Yogic practice)

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ANTIGONE

A Play in One Act
For 3m., 3w., 2 either, plus chorus

CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE / A MESSENGER

CREON

HIS AIDE

ISMENE / CHORUS

A GUARD / CHORUS

TEIRIESIAS / CHORUS

HAEMON / A MESSENGER / CHORUS

EURDYDICE / A MESSENGER / CHORUS

In the Ten Thousand Things production, there was a live percussionist.

ANTIGONE was premiered in November 2005 by Ten Thousand Things Theater Company of Minneapolis in Minnesota. The production included the following:

Director MICHELLE HENSLEY
Percussion HEATHER BARRINGER
Sets. STEPHEN MOHRING
Costumes. VERA MARINER
Assistant Director JACK MATHESON

CAST

Creon. BOB DAVIS*
Aide LUVERNE SEIFERT
Antigone KATE EIFRIG*
Ismene. SONJA PARKS*
Guard. DARIEN JOHNSON
Haemon, Creon's son RON MENZEL*
Teiresias, the prophet PATTI SHAW*
Eurydice, Creon's wife. CARLA NOACK
Chorus CARLA NOACK, PATTI SHAW,
RON MENZEL, DARIEN JOHNSON, SONJA PARKS

ANTIGONE received a developmental workshop in October 2004 directed by Daniel Fish at the McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton, N.J.

* Member of Actors Equity Association.

ANTIGONE

(A bare stage. Chairs. Banks of seats. All ACTORS are on stage for the entire performance. CREON, a vigorous man in a suit, speaks to the public as ANTIGONE and ISMENE watch.)

CREON

My fellow citizens, God has delivered us from evil.
The Ship of State is safe.
After torrential storms and upheaval,
We are back on course.
The war is finally over,
And we are victorious.

Why have I decided to speak with you today?...
I want to acknowledge
Your undying respect for the state.
First with Laius, then with his son, Oedipus—
And even after Oedipus died—
You remained loyal; you were steadfast.
You stood by his children.
Now his two sons—
Who were to share power—
Are dead.
Fate has dealt my family another blow—

Brother has slain brother—
And since I am nearest in blood to the dead,
The powers of the throne now rest with me.
I am your King.

It is impossible to know the character of a man...
It is impossible to judge him as a leader
Until he is tested by time,
Until you witness how he leads,
How he makes and executes the law.
Whoever assumes the title, the awesome title of King,
Vows to set the city's course and must enact the soundest
policies.

I fully realize that I must seek counsel.
Is there anyone more dangerous, my fellow citizens,
than a leader who will not yield to good advice?—
Further—is there anything more destructive to a just soci-
ety,
Anything more pernicious—
Than a ruler who places friends or family above the good
of his country?

As God is my witness, I vow to serve our nation
Without prejudice.
But make no mistake.
You are either with us or against us, my fellow citizens.
No enemy of our country can ever be a friend.
And since our country's security must be my prime con-
cern,
In the name of patriotism,
I make my first decree.

Regarding the bodies of the sons of Oedipus:
Eteocles, a hero, who fought for Thebes,
Who fell defending our beloved nation—
Eteocles will be given a hero's burial—
We will lay wreaths, we will sing hymns in his honor.
But his brother, Polyneices,
Who recruited foreign troops,
Who gathered men from other countries to attack our
home,
Who thirsted for his family's blood—
For Polyneices
I forbid the City to honor him with burial.
In fact, I forbid him to be mourned at all.
He is a traitor; he is the enemy.
Let his corpse rot under the sweltering sun,
Food for the birds and the dogs.
Let him be a lesson to the people.
This is how we deal with traitors in Thebes:
Let him rot!
Further, anyone who attempts to bury the enemy—
Either Polyneices or any of the thousand enemy soldiers
Who now lie outside our city's walls—
Anyone who dares bury them
Will be publicly executed.
This is my edict.
Never! will a traitor be honored in this city.
But a patriot
A hero—
He will be honored always,
As much in death
As in life.

(CREON leaves his speaking position and speaks to his AIDE under his breath.)

CREON

Follow my orders and keep your eyes open. Report what you see.

AIDE

Yes, sir.

CREON

And watch what you do. Watch what you say.

AIDE

Only a fool courts his own death, sir.

(ANTIGONE speaks with ISMENE, apart.)

ANTIGONE

Oh, I see, I see...

The evil reserved for the enemy is now reserved for him
we love.

He would let our brother rot?

As I still live and breathe, there is more pain to come.

ISMENE

More pain, Antigone?... What more can happen?

We have nothing now.

ANTIGONE

No, now we will see what you are made of, Ismene...
Are you a royal sister bred of kings, or a coward?
...Will you join me?

ISMENE

What do you mean?

ANTIGONE

Here are my hands. Decide. (*She lifts her hands.*)
Will you help me lift our brother and lower him into the
ground?

ISMENE

You heard Uncle. His burial is forbidden.

ANTIGONE

Creon cannot “forbid” us from burying our own.
He cannot convict us of treason.

ISMENE

He can. They’ll kill you.

ANTIGONE

Kill me, Ismene?
Polyneices is my brother. And lest you forget who you are,
He is your brother, too.

ISMENE

I do not forget who I am.

ANTIGONE

No?

ISMENE

Antigone, *think!*

Think how our father died, in shame and public disgrace.
When he saw his sin— (he himself brought it to light) —
He blinded himself for it.

His mother and his wife—the same woman—our mother
Twisted her own neck, took away her own life at the end
of a noose—

Because she had violated human law as well as divine law.

And our own brothers battled each other for power.

Both of them right, both of them wrong,

They both lost.

Each murdered the other.

They shed their own blood—they shed *our* blood!

And they left us behind to survive alone.

We are completely alone...

Now think how *we* will die if we break the King's law.

We are the daughters of Oedipus, women without men,

Totally alone in a world ruled by men—

We cannot flout the King's authority—

We cannot put our own family above the good of the entire
city.

I beg the dead to understand

And forgive.

I must obey the law.

ANTIGONE

Whose law!? Uncle's??!

I cannot force you to do it, Ismene,
But when you change your mind, (and I know you will) —
I will not let you help me—
I will do it alone.
And if I die in the act of burying him,
It will be a death filled with glory!
I will lie with my beloved.
His grave shall be my grave.
We will enter Paradise together.
The crime is holy;
The criminal is holy...
And think—I have more time to be at home with the dead
 than the living;
I have eternity with the dead.
Do what you like. You dishonor the will of God.

ISMENE

I trust no one who says that she, and she alone,
Obeys the will of God.
I trust no one who says that she and she alone
Knows the will of God.

ANTIGONE

Make all the excuses you want, my sister,
But I am going now to bury my dead brother.

ISMENE

Antigone, don't. At least speak to Uncle.

ANTIGONE

Why?

ISMENE

If you defy his decree and people find you out,
You leave him no recourse.
He will have to have you executed,
Publicly executed.
Help him change his mind.
Reason with him.

ANTIGONE

How can faith battle reason?
I could never change his mind.

ISMENE

Then at least keep this secret.
Wait until nightfall.

ANTIGONE

No, I despise silence.
Tell the world what I have done.
Proclaim it through the streets!

ISMENE

No! How dare you put yourself above the law?
You will destroy us both.

ANTIGONE

Ah! You're one of them.
You'll watch the horror unfold with the rest of them.
Transfixed,
And then, when it is too late,
And you hear the enemy at the gates

You'll cry and bleat like a little lamb:
"How could this happen?"

ISMENE

What horror?
What enemy at the gates?
The war is over!

ANTIGONE

It isn't over, Ismene.
Run along. I don't want to hate you,
But if Polyneices could hear you now,
He'd hate you more than I do.

ISMENE

Stop it! Polyneices brought this on himself!
When Polyneices marched against Thebes,
He also marched against us.

ANTIGONE

Let me do what I have to do:
I'd rather die than live in shame.
I'd rather die than live as you will,
Haunted by the fury of the dead.
And remember—if I die, my death is glory.
Glory!
I'm going now to bury my dead brother. (*She exits.*)

ISMENE

This is suicide! You're mad. (Mad, mad, mad...)

CHORUS #1

(The actors who sit in the audience or around the playing space speak amongst themselves and to ISMENE, the words quick, urgent, tumbling over each other. The M and F identify the side one is on. It need not indicate gender. They are people of Thebes.)

M: *(to ISMENE)* Stop her! You're right. She's going to die for nothing.

F: No, she's doing the right thing.

M: *(to ISMENE)* The war is over. Your brother's dead. Why can't she leave it alone?

M2: We don't want to see her execution.

F: She has to bury her brother! It's her duty.

M: She's breaking the law.

F: Whose law?

M: She can't win, and we'll all pay. You watch.

(The GUARD enters.)

CREON

What is it? Speak.

GUARD

Sir, I can't claim I'm out of breath from running,
Or that I got here as fast I could—no sir—your Honor,
I stopped more than a few times along the way, see—
These thoughts kind of stopped me dead in my tracks
like...

I thought I could hear my own voice yelling at me:

“Turn back, you idiot! What do you think you’re doing?

Ha-ha.

Hey! Slow down, you jerk!

What’re you doing? Racing to your own execution?”

Ha-ha... Things like that. Ha-ha

But I kept moving!

And then I’d stop again and I’d hear myself talking again!

To myself again:

“What are you, a moron? If Creon gets the news before you get there,

What’s to stop him from wringing your neck when you arrive?” Ha-ha...

But here I am! Ha-ha.

Now I’m here! Here I am! Ta-da!

And even though I don’t have a lot to say,

I’ll tell you everything anyway! Ha-ha...

What will be will be—ha-ha

(sing)

Que—

CREON

Get to the point!

GUARD

First, let me just say—

I didn’t do this, and I don’t know who did.

Please! It would be unfair, sir,

Completely unfair to blame it all on me.

CREON

Blame you for what?