

# ANTIGONE, 1865

by Mike Willis

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

The classic Greek tragedy by Sophocles is moved to the fictional Fort Thebes at the end of the U.S. Civil War. It is a war which has pitted brother against brother, and Antigone's brothers have just killed each other in battle. The new fort commander, Colonel Creon, proclaims that one brother, loyal to the Union, will be buried a hero. The traitorous other, loyal to the South, will be left unburied to be picked over by the vultures and dogs. Anyone defying these orders will be shot by a firing squad.

Fierce, yet calmly determined, Antigone tries to provide a decent burial for her "traitorous" brother. When she is caught, Creon sentences her to death. But other soldiers, an old fortune-teller, and even his own son, Haemon, who loves Antigone, plead and warn Creon that his edict is against the will of God. Instead Creon orders Antigone walled up in a cave where she hangs herself. The tragedy is complete when Haemon and Creon's wife then kill themselves.

This classic story with its updated time, place and language, will appeal to modern audiences.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 m, 5 w, extras.)*

ANTIGONE: A young woman, 20.

ISMENE: Antigone's younger sister.

CORPORAL: A Union soldier, 60.

COLONEL CREON: A Union officer, 50.

GUARD: A private in the Union Army.

HAEMON: Creon's son, 20.

TEIRESIAS: An old blind woman.

YOUNG GIRL: The eyes of Teiresias. (Non-speaking role.)

MESSENGER: A Union soldier.

EURYDICE: The wife of Creon.

SOLDIERS: An assortment of Union soldiers.

**PLACE:** The courtyard of a Union fort in Tennessee.

**TIME:** April 12, 1865, the end of the Civil War.

### **SET DESCRIPTION**

The courtyard of Fort Thebes, a Union fort in northern Tennessee near the invisible line that separates North and South. The camp headquarters building spans the UPS area. There is a low porch the length of the building. A bench and some chairs sit on the porch which looks down on the courtyard. A large double door serves as the entrance to the headquarters building. Above the door is a sign which reads, "Commander's Quarters." There is a large sign placed near the peak of the building's roof which reads, "Fort Thebes." A Union flag on a pole is mounted on a low platform in the courtyard DL and a well and some wooden buckets DSR.

**SFX:** Cannon fire, horses approaching, dogs barking.

**PROPS:** Bugle, rope ties, crude stretchers, stage blood.

### Scene 1

*(AT RISE: It is morning. The faint sound of CANNON FIRE can be heard in the distance. HORSES can be heard approaching, followed by DOGS barking. HAEMON enters and crosses to the well. He is dressed as a lieutenant in the Union Army. His clothes are dirty and soiled and he shows obvious signs of having been in battle. Haemon gets some water from the well, washes his face and sits with his head in his hands at the base of the well. CREON enters from the wings. Dressed as a Union colonel, his uniform is clean and unsoiled, his boots highly polished, in stark contrast to Haemon. Creon starts to ascend the stairs to the headquarters building, sees Haemon and crosses DS.)*

CREON: *(With some discomfort.)* You fought bravely today. I'm...proud of you. You should hold your head high for what was accomplished.

HAEMON: I'm sorry, Father, you'll have to forgive me if I don't feel especially proud about what happened today. I just feel tired.

CREON: It was a great victory for the Union cause. We held the fort, and didn't surrender our position. Johnny Reb will think twice before he attacks Fort Thebes again.

HAEMON: A great victory? General Eteocles was killed!

CREON: I know, and the General's death requires that I assume command of the fort. I'll need to begin attending to my duties. *(Calling offstage.)* Corporal!

*(THE CORPORAL enters from SR. He walks with a distinct limp. He is dressed in a Union uniform and has a bugle attached to his belt.)*

CORPORAL: Yes, sir?

CREON: See to the horses and check our losses. Report back to me. I'll be in my office.

CORPORAL: Yes, sir. *(HE salutes CREON and both start to leave, but stop as HAEMON speaks.)*

HAEMON: I was there...I saw it happen.

CREON: Saw what? What did you see?

HAEMON: General Eteocles and his brother, Captain Polyneices.

CREON: Polyneices was a traitor! He chose his course when he joined the Confederates. He deserved to die.

HAEMON: Who chooses who deserves to die, Father? They were brothers!

CREON: They were enemies, Lieutenant! This is war!

HAEMON: *(Stands up. Quietly after a pause.)* They just stood there... looking at each other, for what seemed like an eternity. The rest of the battle felt far away...like the world had stopped to watch. They both said hello and then talked briefly of the irony behind their chance meeting. Then...they stopped talking and...just stood there, sabres drawn...smiling at each other. The next instant, they both lunged, each finding his mark. The General managed to crawl to his brother's side. Captain Polyneices reached out his hand...and the General took it...and there they lie, hand-in-hand, side-by-side...two brothers.

CREON: Enemies, Lieutenant! This is a war, don't let the sentimentality of brotherhood cloud your purpose for being here. You are here to protect your country from those who call themselves soldiers of the Confederate States of America. Brothers or not...never forget that, Lieutenant. Captain Polyneices was the enemy and a traitor. I plan on making an example of Captain Polyneices.

HAEMON: An example?

CREON: Our troops and the inhabitants of the surrounding settlement need to be reminded of how we feel about traitors. Our fallen comrade, General Eteocles, will be given a burial with full military honors; but Captain Polyneices' body will be left to rot in the sun.

HAEMON: Father, you can't!

CREON: *(Coldly.)* I can, Lieutenant...and what's more, anyone caught touching the Captain's body will face a firing squad in this very courtyard. Do you understand, Lieutenant? *(HAEMON nods.)* Now make yourself presentable, in a manner befitting a Union officer.

CORPORAL: Colonel, if I might...

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