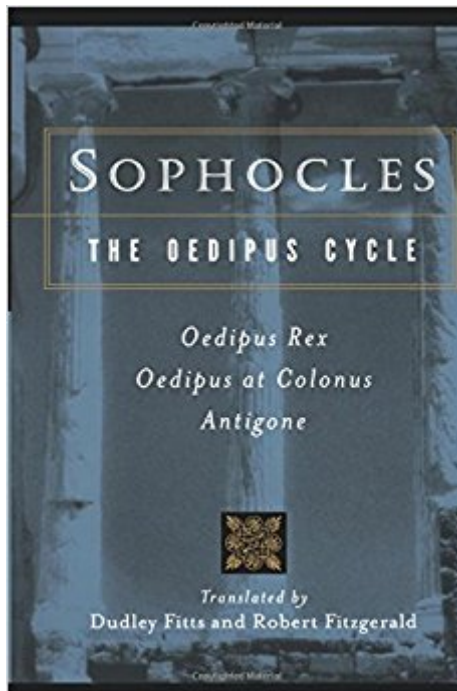


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Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle: Oedipus Rex, Oedipus At Colonus, Antigone



Synopsis

English versions of Sophocles's three great tragedies based on the myth of Oedipus, translated for a modern audience by two gifted poets. Index.

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Customer Reviews

"Oedipus Rex" is not only the most read Greek tragedy, it is also the most misread. The play's reputation exists in part because it is presented as the paradigmatic example of the Greek tragedy by no less an authority than Aristotle in his "Poetics." No doubt this reputation played a part in making it one of the relatively few plays by Sophocles that has been preserved from ancient times. Whenever I have taught the Greek tragedies in various classes my students almost always find in the play the best examples of Aristotle's key concepts of *harmartia* ("tragic error of judgment"), *anagnorisis* ("recognition"), *peripeteia* ("reversal"), *catharsis*, etc. Still, there is the fact that because even those who do not know the play know the story about the man who killed his father and married his mother, "Oedipus Rex" is usually misread by students. Because they know the curse they miss something very important: the curse that the oracle at Delphi tells Oedipus (ln. 752-57) is not the same curse that was told to his parents (ln. 676-78). The only reference to Oedipus by name in Homer appears in the "Iliad" (Book 23, ln 756) where it says that the king of Thebes died in battle, which suggests he was not blind. At some point in between the time of Homer and when Sophocles wrote this play, the tradition became that Oedipus blinded himself (Ismene refers to it in "Antigone,"

In 37-39, which was written 15 years earlier but may have been edited later to conform with the more famous work). Sophocles could be playing with the legend again by having the prophecy change because this way there is an explanation for the sin of incest being part of the prophecy: it is added when Jocasta tries to thwart destiny and she herself gives the baby Oedipus over to the huntsman to be killed.

I had to read OEDIPUS REX for my pre-IB sophomore English class, feeling not too happy with another dull, lengthy Greek play (we had to read THE ODYSSEY last year, and it got really redundant). But Sophocles' play...wow, it's totally different! The characters are so much more real and the speeches are deep and engrossing. Thebes is fascinating, substantial - and the issues grip you unknowingly. ...When you finally resurface, you feel touched and bewildered at the same time! Throughout THE OEDIPUS CYCLE run themes of fate and visions of free will amid reality. These elements reveal the universal truth: of human blindness to fate and truth; their blind resolutions that, in reality, lead them to their fate. Tragedy is forged between a character's personality and the inevitable events connected to it. Although the doctrine of predestination rejects independent will, OEDIPUS REX succeeds in explaining the coexistence, in which action is subordinate to destiny through ignorance. "I was blind and now I can tell why: asleep for you had given ease of breath to Thebes while the false years went by." THE OEDIPUS CYCLE beautifully fits Aristotle's definition of tragedies, being a casual, inevitable sequence of events connected intimately with the personality of the tragic character." Even if your English class doesn't require you to pick up this title, I highly recommend that you do. Being a translation, the language is very clear and reading is direct. But the subject is still full - and full of revelation! It is so amazing, you have to experience it for yourself! I ended up reading all 3 plays of the cycle and they are all very different but I would think that OEDIPUS REX is the strongest one.

As a reader, I tend to be an opponent of neoclassicism, and have historically not been impressed with the original Greek and Roman works I have read, although my experience with the literature has been rather slight, and my views are slowly becoming more charitable. I had encountered the three plays that make up Sophocles's Oedipus cycle (Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone) in high school; the first and last were required, and I read the middle one to get the full story. At the time, I was quite impressed by these works, and now, years later, my appreciation for these incredible plays has only grown. I would opine that one of the greatest tragedies regarding works now lost is the fact that only seven plays out of well over one hundred authored by

Sophocles survive today. Many people know at least some parts of the Oedipus story, but some summary is called for. Oedipus, the hero-king of Thebes, must unravel a mystery that reveals him to be the murderer of his father and the despoiler of his own mother, a monstrous crime for which his city suffers. Upon realizing that the gods and fate cannot be circumvented, he gouges his eyes out, his mother/wife kills herself, and he goes into exile, leaving his friend Creon as king and guardian of his two young daughters, Antigone and Ismene. In Oedipus at Colonus, Oedipus is in the company of his now-teenage daughters and Theseus, King of Athens. His sons Eteocles and Polyneices decide to contest Creon's rule, and Oedipus finally achieves rest. Antigone, the final play in the series, takes place after the brothers are both dead, Creon is on the throne, and Antigone and Ismene are fully grown.

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