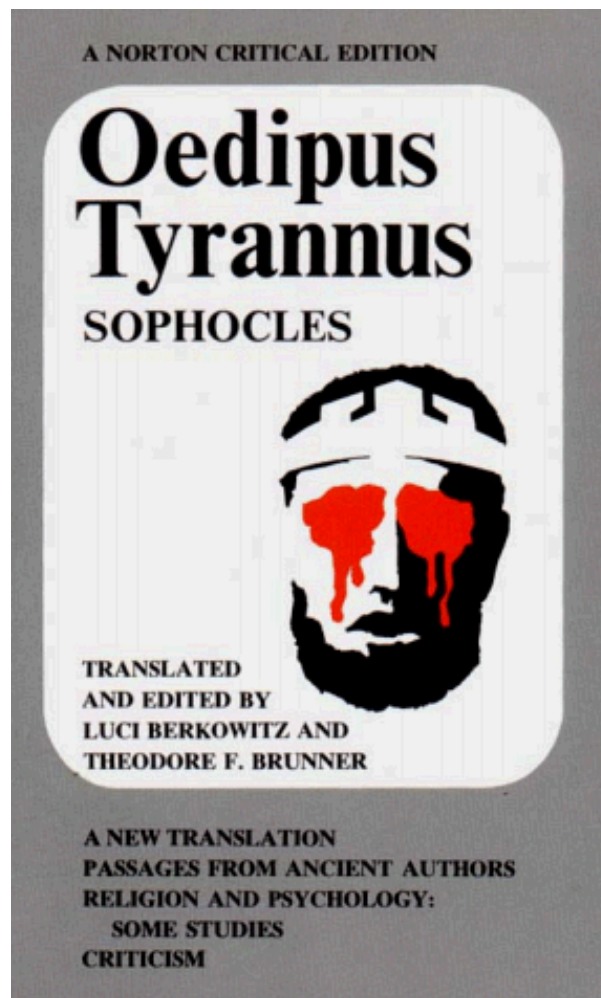


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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Oedipus Tyrannus

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TRANSLATED
AND EDITED BY
LUCI BERKOWITZ AND
THEODORE F. BRUNNER

A NEW TRANSLATION
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Language Notes

Text: English, Greek (translation)

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

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This translation is for the contemporary reader. Specifically commissioned for stage production, it rings easily on the modern ear and yet remains faithful to Sophocles' original, avoiding the archaisms of other translations.

The text is accompanied by a wealth of carefully chosen background materials and essays.

"Passages from Ancient Authors" includes selections from Homer's *Odyssey*, Thucydides' account of the plague, and Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

The best of ancient and modern criticism is represented, encouraging discussion from psychological, religious, anthropological, dramatic, and literary perspectives.

Under the heading "Religion and Psychology" are included writings on the Oedipus myth by Martin P. Nilsson, Meyer Fortes, Gordon M. Kirkwood, Thalia Phyllis Feldman, and Sigmund Freud.

The authors of the selections in "Criticism" are Aristotle, C. M. Bowra, R. C. Jebb, S. M. Adams, A. J. A. Waldock, Albin Lesky, Werner Jaeger, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Jones, D. W. Lucas, Bernard M. W. Knox, Cedric H. Whitman, Richmond Lattimore, Robert Cohen, Francis Fergusson, and H. D. F. Kitto.

The special question of Oedipus's guilt or innocence is addressed in essays by J. T. Sheppard, Laszlo Versenyi, P. H. Vellacott, E. R. Dodds, Thomas Gould, and Philip Wheelwright.

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Prose translation in 20th century idiom

By Bryan Byrd

It is doubtful that anyone needs a recap of the play *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*, other than it is the dramatic reenactment of the moment Oedipus discovers that he is the murderer of his father and now husband to his mother. Longstanding member of the Western Canon, it is argued by some to be the greatest of the Greek tragedies extant. And, based on no more than the critical essays which accompany this Norton edition, it would seem that the way in which the play raises such issues as fate versus free will, the innocence or guilt of Oedipus, or what might be the deeper meaning of the play is as intriguing, puzzling, and verbiage-inducing as that concerning a certain Prince of Denmark.

I'll not add to it, other than to say that I deeply felt the inherent power in the play, despite the fact that I probably couldn't verbalize exactly why even if I wanted to. *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS* strikes me as one of those peculiar works of literature--not unlike *HAMLET*--which seems rather plain and straightforward at the conscious level, but sets to vibrating some interior chord, and the dissonance between the two creates a kind of dialectic exchange which eludes synthesis. In other words, I don't know what the hell the play means, exactly, but I really liked it.

As with all Norton Critical Editions, a corpus of essays follow the principal work, though if one were looking for someone to 'explain' Oedipus to you, you'll likely be disappointed. Many of these essays have a very similar beginning to them: Thalia Feldman, 'So complex are the problems of interpretation...'; C. M. Bowra, '...the surviving plays of Sophocles form so small a proportion of what he wrote that it is rash to generalize...'; R. C. Jebb, 'A drama itself is the only adequate commentary on its persons'; S.M. Adams. 'One of the penalties of any great work of art is that it lends itself to various interpretations'; and, my favorite, A. J. A. Waldock, 'Possibly the best service a critic can render the *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS* is to leave it alone'. If Ms. Berkowitz and Mr. Brunner, translators and editors, hoped to impart the idea that there is little critical consensus concerning the play, they succeeded. In fact, several of the essays included here respond to one another, sometimes condescendingly so, which is a bit humorous, in its way, but not necessarily helpful in assisting the reader to arrive at an interpretation that is satisfactory to them. But, that goes back to my point--the play is a sort of conundrum, and probably derives much of its power from it. Reduction would only rob it of its fascination.

That isn't to say that the essays here are worthless--that will depend on what you are looking for. I confess, I WAS looking for explanation when I first started to read them, and for a moment, was frustrated that I wasn't seeing it. Once I discarded the idea that any explanation was forthcoming, I began to take the essays in the manner in which they were designed, and which was well summarized by the last lines of the last essay: 'Our analyses are at best propaedeutic (introductory). They explain nothing essential, but do their work if they steer us to a fresh reading of the play with our visual and auditory imagination newly alerted'.

This translation, despite its description as 'new', is copyrighted 1966, but was deliberately translated using 20th century idiom. Frankly, this was very welcome to me; after trying and failing to get very far into

Lattimore and Green's translations of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, I had begun to be afraid that the classics of Greek drama were closed to me without some form of intensive study. While this translation may not suit those readers already familiar with the play, I can easily recommend it to those who, like me, have been intimidated by the density of other translations.

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

As modern today as it was in Ancient Greece

By M. H. Bayliss

We read this classic outloud in my high school class this year and my students could not believe how modern the themes were. Everyone can relate to the detective element (many critics claim this as the first true detective plot), the search for truth, the irony (the very definition of dramatic irony is Oedipus) and the gripping plot. I would also like to add that as always the Norton editions are by the far the best available. They have terrific background information and a great collection of pertinent essays. They make scholars out of just regular readers. If you never read Oedipus, buy it now!

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Oedipus Rules

By David Kidd

This translation facilitates the modern reader's understanding of this crucial and difficult ancient play. What's most impressive is that this edition includes really helpful information and criticism for the general reader and the scholar. Not only will students and teachers benefit from the lucid scholarship, but the general reader will be intrigued by the volumes of historical, psychological, and dramaturgical essays in this book. Even Oedipus would wish his eyes back to be able to read this translation.

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