Sophocles: Oedipus Tyrannus

Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* (or *Oedipus Rex*) has exerted more influence than any other drama, ancient or modern, on the history of theatre, and this influence has extended far beyond the boundaries of the Western theatrical tradition to include African and Oriental theatre histories as well. This volume traces Sophocles’ paradigmatic ancient tragedy from its first appearance on the stage in the fifth century BC to present-day productions. The afterlife of *Oedipus* has played a key role in the history of ideas, and this volume examines its centrality to the history of stage censorship and political and cultural upheaval across the centuries. More recently, the protagonist has come under close scrutiny in his association with the Oedipus of psychoanalytical theory. Macintosh demonstrates how, by following the fortunes of Sophocles’ *Oedipus* on the world stage, one witnesses its intersection with and impact upon the history of theatre and the history of ideas.

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Frontispiece – design for British première of Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* (1961), Sadler’s Wells, London, by Abd’Elkader Farrah
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SOPHOCLES

Oedipus Tyrannus

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FIONA MACINTOSH

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Sophocles’ tragedy is referred to throughout the text as *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as opposed to the rather nineteenth-century, honorific title, *Oedipus the King*. Indeed, many of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century versions under discussion in this volume drop the epithet ‘King’/’Rex’ altogether as they fashion a post-Freudian/Arthur Miller-esque, Everyman/Ordinary Man, Oedipus. The ancient Greek term *tyrannos* – meaning the non-hereditary ruler who has come to the throne by force and not by birthright – carries with it on occasions the modern connotations of the word ‘tyrant’. The ambiguity in the Sophoclean title is also an important factor in various adaptations; and for this reason, it has been maintained here, even if the other titles – *Oedipus the King* or *Oedipus Rex* – are more familiar to many readers.

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated, and all abbreviations of ancient sources are taken from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edition, Oxford 1996).
PRODUCTIONS

The productions listed here are those discussed in this volume, and with their première dates only (revivals have not been listed). For a comprehensive listing, go to the online database of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, University of Oxford (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk, edited and maintained by Amanda Wrigley).

467 BC Aeschylus, *Oedipus* (wins first prize with *Laius, Seven against Thebes, Sphinx* [satyr play]) at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens

430–425? Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens

409–407 Euripides, *Phoenician Women* at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens

408–401 Euripides, *Oedipus* at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens

401 Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* posthumously produced by Sophocles’ grandson, also called Sophocles, at the Festival of Dionysus in Athens

c. AD 41–9 Seneca’s *Oedipus*

64–8 Emperor Nero regularly performs the role of Oedipus

1559–60 Seneca’s *Oedipus*, in a translation by Alexander Neville, performed at Trinity College, Cambridge

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1678 Dryden and Lee’s *Oedipus*, performed by the Duke’s Company at the Dorset Garden Theatre, London
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1858 Jules Lacroix’s *Oedipe-Roi*, Comédie Française, Paris, with Edmond Geffroy in title role
1881 Jean Mounet-Sully takes the part of Oedipe in Lacroix’s *Oedipe-Roi* at the Comédie Française, Paris
1910 *Oedipus Rex*, in a version by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, directed by Max Reinhardt at the Musikfesthalle, Munich, and then at Zirkus Schumann, Berlin, with Alexander Moissi as Oedipus
1912 *Oedipus Rex*, in Gilbert Murray’s translation of Hofmannsthal’s version, directed by Max Reinhardt at Covent Garden, London, with John Martin-Harvey as Oedipus and Lillah McCarthy as Jocasta
1919 *Oedipe, roi de Thèbes* by Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, dir. Firmin Gémier at Cirque d’Hiver, Paris
1926 W.B. Yeats’s *Oedipus the King*, Abbey Theatre, Dublin
1927 *Oedipus Rex* by Igor Stravinsky/Jean Cocteau, Ballets Russes, Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt, Paris
1932 *Oedipe* by André Gide, dir. Georges Pitoëff, Théâtre des Arts, Paris
1934 *La Machine infernale* by Jean Cocteau, dir. Louis Jouvet, Comédie des Champs-Élysées, Paris
1937 *Oedipe-Roi* by Jean Cocteau, dir. Jean Cocteau, Théâtre Antoine, Paris, with Jean Marais as Oedipus
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1945  Oedipus Rex, directed Michel Saint-Denis, with Laurence Olivier as Oedipus, Old Vic Company at The New Theatre, London

1947  Martha Graham’s Night Journey, dance version, with music by William Schuman, Harvard Music Department, Cambridge, MA


1954  Oedipus Rex, dir. Tyrone Guthrie, Stratford, Ontario, with James Mason as Oedipus

1956  Film of Oedipus Rex, dir. Tyrone Guthrie, Stratford, Ontario, with Douglas Campbell as Oedipus

1967  Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film Edipo Re

1968  Ola Rotimi’s The Gods Are Not to Blame, directed by Ola Rotimi (who also played Narrator), Ori Olokun Players, University of Ife, Nigeria, with Femi Robinson as Odewale (Oedipus)

1978  André Boucourechliev’s opera, Le Nom d’Oedipe, with a libretto by Hélène Cixous, in the Cour du Palais des Papes, at the Festival d’Avignon, under the direction of Claude Régy, conductor Claude Prin

1980  Steven Berkoff’s Greek, Half Moon Theatre, London

1983  Lee Breuer’s Gospel at Colonus, music composed by Bob Telson, Carey Playhouse, Brooklyn, and Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York

1986  Oedipus Rex, directed by Yukio Ninagawa, adapted by Mutsuo Takahashi, Honganji Temple in Tsukiji, Tokyo (an earlier version dates from 1976 and a later version was staged in 2002)

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