

FOCUS CLASSICAL LIBRARY

SOPHOCLES

THE THEBAN PLAYS

ANTIGONE • KING OIDIPOUS • OIDIPOUS AT COLONUS



RUBY BLONDELL

SOPHOCLES: THE THEBAN PLAYS

**ANTIGONE
KING OIDIPOUS
OIDIPOUS AT COLONUS**

**TRANSLATION WITH NOTES
AND INTRODUCTION**

**RUBY BLONDELL
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON**

Focus Classical Library
Focus Publishing
R. Pullins Company
Newburyport MA

THE FOCUS CLASSICAL LIBRARY
Series Editors • James Clauss and Stephen Esposito

- Aristophanes: Acharnians • Jeffrey Henderson • 1992 • 1-58510-087-0
Aristophanes: The Birds • Jeffrey Henderson • 1999 • 0-941051-87-0
Aristophanes: Clouds • Jeffrey Henderson • 1992 • 0-941051-24-2
Aristophanes: Lysistrata • Jeffrey Henderson • 1988 • 0-941051-02-1
Aristophanes: Three Comedies: Acharnians, Lysistrata, Clouds • Jeffrey Henderson • 1997 • 0-941051-58-7
Euripides: The Bacchae • Stephen Esposito • 1998 • 0-941051-42-0
Euripides: Four Plays: Medea, Hippolytus, Heracles, Bacchae • Stephen Esposito, ed. • 2003 • 1-58510-048-X
Euripides: Hecuba • Robin Mitchell-Boyask • 2006 • 1-58510-148-6
Euripides: Heracles • Michael R. Halleran • 1988 • 0-941051-01-3
Euripides: Hippolytus • Michael R. Halleran • 2001 • 0-941051-86-2
Euripides: Medea • Anthony Podlecki • 2005, Revised • 0-941051-10-2
Euripides: The Trojan Women • Diskin Clay • 2005 • 1-58510-111-7
Golden Verses: Poetry of the Augustan Age • Paul T. Alessi • 2003 • 1-58510-064-1
Golden Prose in the Age of Augustus • Paul T. Alessi • 2004 • 1-58510-125-7
Hesiod: Theogony • Richard Caldwell • 1987 • 0-941051-00-5
The Homeric Hymns • Susan Shelmerdine • 1995 • 1-58510-019-6
Ovid: Metamorphoses • Z. Philip Ambrose • 2004 • 1-58510-103-6
Sophocles: Antigone • Ruby Blondell • 1998 • 0-941051-25-0
Sophocles: King Oedipus • Ruby Blondell • 2002 • 1-58510-060-9
Sophocles: Oedipus at Colonus • Ruby Blondell • 2003 Revised • 1-58510-065-X
Sophocles: Philoktetes • Seth Schein • 2003 • 1-58510-086-2
Sophocles: The Theban Plays • Ruby Blondell • 2002 • 1-58510-037-4
Terence: Brothers (Adelphoe) • Charles Mercier • 1998 • 0-941051-72-2 [VHS • 0-941051-73-0]
Vergil: The Aeneid • Richard Caldwell • 2004 • 1-58510-077-3

Copyright © 2002, 2004 Ruby Blondell.

Cover: Apulian jug (Oinochoe) by the Darius Painter showing Teiresias led into the presence of Oedipus, c. 340/330 B.C. Courtesy: Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Inv. BS 473. Photo: Claire Niggli.

ISBN 10: 1-58510-037-4

ISBN 13: 978-1-58510-037-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

This book is published by Focus Publishing, R. Pullins & Company, Inc., PO Box 369, Newburyport MA 01950. All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, by photocopying, recording, or by any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

0108TS

Table of Contents

Preface	vii
Introduction.....	1
Sophocles	1
Theater and Performance	6
Mythic Background	16
Religious Background	20
<i>Antigone</i>	33
<i>King Oidipous</i>	91
<i>Oidipous at Colonus</i>	155
Map 1: Mainland Greece	228
Map 2: Attica and Environs	229
Suggestions for Further Reading	230

Preface

This volume combines updated versions of my translations of Sophocles' three Theban plays, which have already been published as separate volumes.¹ *Oidipous at Colonus* appears in its second edition, which was heavily revised from the first. *Antigone* and *King Oidipous* have been corrected and more lightly revised, with an eye to consistency for this volume as a whole. The notes have been trimmed, and the interpretive essays at the ends of the individual volumes have been sacrificed, in order to keep the volume from becoming too large. The Introduction recapitulates those of all three earlier volumes, but also includes an expanded section on religion, in order to include some essential background material that originally appeared in the essays.

The translations are aimed at readers, especially students and teachers, who wish to work with a version that is close to the Greek. I have tried as far as possible to remain faithful to Greek idiom and metaphor, to translate words important for the meaning of the play consistently, and sometimes to retain the original word order, verse and sentence structure. This approach sometimes leads to awkwardness, but I hope this will be outweighed by its benefits. Though many aspects of the poetry have inevitably been lost, as they must be in any translation, I believe, and hope the reader will discover, that much of the poetry of meaning is best communicated in such a way.

The original meters have inevitably been sacrificed, but I have used a kind of six-beat iambic line for the iambic (spoken) portions of the drama, and tried to retain an approximately anapestic rhythm for Sophocles' anapests (which are printed in italics). I have not used any formal metrical scheme for the lyrics, or sung portions of the text, which are simply rendered in short lines and indented. (In order to avoid confusing the reader, in some lyric passages I have increased the number of lines so that they match the marginal line numbers, which are the same as in the Greek text.) Despite this attempt to retain some of the rhythmic sense of the original, my first priorities have

¹ M.W. Blundell, *Sophocles' Antigone, Translated with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay* (Focus Classical Library, Newburyport MA 1998); R. Blondell, *Sophocles' King Oidipous, Translated with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay* (Focus Classical Library, Newburyport MA 2002); R. Blondell, *Sophocles' Oidipous at Colonus, Translated with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay*, revised edn. 2002 (Focus Classical Library, Newburyport MA).

usually been accuracy and consistency.

The spellings of Greek names represent an attempt to reap some of the benefits of both comfort and defamiliarization. For the most part I have used traditional English spelling for the names of historical persons and places (e.g. Aeschylus, Athens), but transliterated mythological names in so far as this accords with modern English pronunciation (e.g. Kreon, Polyneices). In the case of Oidipous, there are further reasons for preferring this spelling over "Oedipus," since it not only captures more effectively the many puns upon this name in *King Oidipous*, but encourages the reader to resist the anachronistic Freudian associations of the traditional spelling.

The explanatory notes are aimed at those approaching this play, and perhaps all ancient Greek literature, for the first time. They provide factual information on such matters as mythology, geography and unfamiliar customs, together with clarification of obscure phrases and a few interpretive pointers. There are no stage directions in ancient Greek texts. Those provided in the translation are based on indications in the script, and are intended to clarify the stage action for the modern reader.

The translations of *Antigone* and *OT* were based on Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Nigel Wilson's Oxford Classical Text (Oxford 1990), but I have departed from their text on occasion. In places I followed the text of Mark Griffith's edition of *Antigone* (Cambridge 1999). I also found his notes extremely valuable. My original translation of *Oidipous at Colonus* followed A.C. Pearson's Oxford Classical Text (Oxford 1924), with some departures. For the revised edition, I also consulted Lloyd-Jones and Wilson's OCT and followed their text in numerous places. The translation and notes for all three plays are indebted to Jebb's great work,² and to a lesser extent to Kamerbeek's more recent commentaries.³ I also consulted Dawe's edition of *OT* (Cambridge 1982), and benefited from felicitous phrasing in Hugh Lloyd-Jones' translations for the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA 1994).

It remains to reiterate my thanks to friends, students and colleagues who assisted me in various ways with the individual translations: James Clauss, Ann Cumming, Alain Gowing, Mark Griffith, David Guichard, Michael Halleran, Yurie Hong, John Kirby and his students, Brady Mechley, Pauline Ripat, Douglas Roach, Stephen Sharpe, and the students in my Sophocles class in the Autumn of 2001.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
SEATTLE

² R.C. Jebb, *Sophocles, the Plays and Fragments. Part I: The Oedipus Tyrannus* (2nd edn. Cambridge 1887); *Part II: The Oedipus Coloneus* (3rd edn. Cambridge 1900); *Part III: The Antigone* (3rd edn. Cambridge 1900).

³ J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries Part II: The Oedipus Coloneus* (Leiden 1984); *Part III: The Antigone* (Leiden 1978); *Part IV: The Oedipus Tyrannus* (Leiden 1967).

Introduction

SOPHOCLES

Of the hundreds of tragedies produced in fifth-century BCE Athens, only a handful of works, by just three dramatists, have survived to the present day. Seven of these plays are by the poet Sophocles, who was born at Colonus, the rural village near Athens where *Oidipous at Colonus* is set, in about 495 BCE. This makes him a generation younger than his great predecessor Aeschylus (c. 525-456), and ten or fifteen years older than Euripides (c. 480-406). But the relationship between the three tragedians and their works is not strictly linear. The first dozen years of Sophocles' career overlapped with Aeschylus' final years, and for the rest of his long life Euripides was his rival. Aeschylus made use of Sophocles' theatrical innovations (discussed below), and Sophocles in turn was influenced by Euripides. It is said that when Euripides died in 406 BCE, Sophocles dressed his chorus in mourning at a public ceremony that preceded the dramatic festival (the *proagōn*). He himself was to die later the same year, or early in the next. In the fourth century and beyond, these three men rapidly became canonized as the great figures of the Athenian tragic theater, which led to the survival of some of their works when the entire output of the other tragic playwrights was lost. As with all ancient texts, the survival of these particular plays depended not only on the vagaries of taste, but on the chancy process of hand-copying and recopying manuscripts, until the advent of printing nearly two thousand years later.

Sophocles lived a long and active life, spanning almost the whole of the fifth century BCE, which saw a great many political and cultural achievements at Athens. We know almost nothing of his background (except that his father, Sophillus, is said to have owned a weapons factory), but the evidence of his career suggests a well-connected family. Like any Athenian boy whose father could afford it, he will have received the customary education in music, poetry and athletics. The mainstay of this education was Homer, especially the *Iliad*, which was thought to embody not just literary excellence but traditional cultural and moral values. As a child, Sophocles will have learned to recite large quantities of the epic from memory. This must have been especially significant for the future playwright whom later writers were to describe as "most Homeric" of the tragedians.

The poet's childhood coincided with the Persian Wars, in which the Greeks, largely under the leadership of Athens, foiled repeated Persian attempts to invade the Greek mainland. Sophocles was about five years old when the Athenians won their first great victory over the Persians at the battle of Marathon (490 BCE). When the Persians were defeated again, in a sea-battle off the island of Salamis in 480 BCE, the young Sophocles is said to have led the dance in celebration of the victory. If true, this was a significant honor, as well as a tribute to the youth's good looks and physical grace. He grew to maturity in the years that followed the Persian Wars, when the power and influence of Athens were on the rise. After their victory, the city founded the Delian League, an alliance of Greek states for mutual defense against the Persians. But as the fifth century progressed Athens took increasing control of the League, until it grew to resemble an Athenian empire more than an alliance of free states. The so-called allies were soon required to pay Athens large amounts of annual tribute in the form of ships or money. This period of Athenian history is marked by the leadership of Pericles, who was born around the same time as Sophocles and dominated public life from about 460 BCE until his death from the plague in 429. He both strengthened democracy at home and expanded Athenian influence abroad, in large part by exploiting Athenian leadership of the Delian League.

One of Pericles' most ambitious enterprises was the public building program that culminated in the construction of the Parthenon—the great temple of Athena, the city's patron goddess, on the Acropolis. Like other such projects, this temple, with its magnificent architecture and sculptural decoration, was partly financed by taxes from members of the Delian League. Besides supporting the visual arts, Pericles was a patron of writers and thinkers, helping to promote the extraordinary artistic and intellectual accomplishments of fifth-century Athens. Literary excellence was also fostered by the generally open and tolerant nature of Athenian democratic society, which placed a high value on artistic achievement and freedom of expression. (The notoriously provocative philosopher Socrates was active as a "gadfly" throughout most of this period, and was not prosecuted until 399 BCE, after Athens had become demoralized by defeat and less tolerant of public criticism.) But the cultural achievements of Periclean Athens meant little to the oppressed members of its empire or to its rivals, headed by Sparta. In 431 BCE, when Sophocles was in his sixties, the resentment aroused by Athenian expansion culminated in the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, between Athens with its allies on one side and Sparta with its allies on the other. This long and draining war dominated the last twenty-five years of the poet's life, and he was to die before it finally ended with the defeat of Athens in 404 BCE.

Sophocles began his dramatic career in 468 BCE, when with his first set of plays (which have not survived) he defeated Aeschylus to win first prize in the tragic competition (discussed further below). By this time tragedy in Athens had already developed into a mature art form. But the conventions of the genre were not static, and Sophocles earned a reputation as a theatrical innovator. Aristotle tells us in his treatise on drama, the *Poetics*, that he

ANTIGONE

CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE, daughter of Oidipous (former king of Thebes)

ISMENE, daughter of Oidipous

CHORUS, fifteen aged noblemen of Thebes

KREON, king of Thebes, uncle and guardian of Antigone and Ismene

GUARD, an aged and lowly soldier under Kreon's command

HAIMON, son of Kreon

TEIRESIAS, an aged prophet

MESSENGER, an attendant of Kreon

EURYDIKE, wife of Kreon

Guards and attendants of Kreon, Teiresias and Eurydike

Setting: Outside the royal palace of Thebes. The scene shows the façade of the palace, which has a large central door. The time is just before dawn, on the morning following the successful defeat of Polyneices and his allies in their assault on Thebes.

[Enter Antigone and Ismene from the palace. Antigone addresses her sister in iambic trimeters, the meter of dialogue (Introduction, p. 15).]

ANTIGONE

Ismene, my own sister, sharing the self-same blood,
of all the evils that descend from Oidipous
do you know one that Zeus does not fulfill for us,
the two still living?¹ There is nothing—no!—no grief,
no doom, dishonor or disgrace that I've not seen
counted among the evils that are yours and mine.²
Now this! What is this proclamation that they say

5

¹ Oidipous' children have inherited his misfortunes. (Introduction, p. 27). On Zeus see Introduction, p. 21.

² In *OC*, the sisters are portrayed as suffering many hardships. Cf. also *OT* 1486-1502. On the word "evil" (*kakos*) see n. on *OC* 87.

the general has just made to all the city's people?³
Have you heard anything? Or are you unaware
that evils due to enemies approach our friends?⁴ 10

ISMENE

To me no word of friends has come, Antigone,
sweet or distressing, since the time when you and I
were both deprived, we two, of our two brothers, both
struck dead by two-fold hand within a single day;
and since the army of the Argives disappeared 15
during the night just past, I have learned nothing new—
whether my fortune has improved or I am doomed.

ANTIGONE

I knew it well. That's why I brought you here outside
the courtyard gates, for you to hear me by yourself.

ISMENE

What is it? You are clearly brooding on some news. 20

ANTIGONE

What? Has not Kreon honored only one of our
two brothers with a tomb, and dishonored the other?⁵
Eteokles he has seen fit to treat with justice, so
they say, and lawfully⁶ concealed beneath
the ground, there to be honored by the dead below; 25
but as for Polyneices' miserable corpse,
they say the townsfolk have received a proclamation,
that none may shroud him in a tomb or wail for him;
he must be left unwept, unburied, treasure sweet
for watching birds to feed on at their pleasure. 30
They say that this is what good Kreon has proclaimed
for you and me—yes, *me* as well!—and that he's coming

³ The "general" is Kreon, who has been made commander-in-chief as well as king of Thebes by the death of Eteokles and Polyneices. He also displays a military outlook in his capacity as king and father (see especially 639-80 and cf. e.g. 241, 1033-4). "City" translates the word *polis* (see n. 1 on *OC*, below p. 155).

⁴ This line could mean "the evils inflicted on our (recently-vanquished) enemies," or "the evils appropriate to enemies (generally)," or "evils coming from our enemies (i.e. Kreon)." But however it is interpreted, it accords with the Greek code of popular ethics that required one to help one's friends and harm one's enemies.

⁵ The rituals of burial were enormously important in the Greek world (see Introduction, p. 29).

⁶ This is the first occurrence of a key word in the play, *nomos*. It has been translated throughout as "law," but unlike the English word, *nomos* covers not only the written laws of a society, but also custom and tradition, including the "unwritten laws" to which Antigone will later appeal (450-57).

here to make his proclamation clear to those
 who do not know;⁷ nor does he view the matter as
 a trivial one: the penalty prescribed for such 35
 a deed is death from stoning by the city's people.
 That's how things stand; soon you'll reveal if you're
 noble by birth, or evil from good origins.

ISMENE

If that is how things are, unhappy one, what good
 can *I* do, loosening or tightening the knot?⁸ 40

ANTIGONE

See if you'll join in laboring to do a deed.

ISMENE

What deed of danger? What can you be thinking of?

ANTIGONE

See if you'll join these hands of mine to lift the corpse.

ISMENE

What, bury him? When it's forbidden to the city?⁹

ANTIGONE

Yes, bury my own brother—and yours too—if you're 45
 not willing. *I* will not be caught in treachery.¹⁰

ISMENE

Audacious one! Against Kreon's express command?

ANTIGONE

He has no business keeping me from what is mine.

ISMENE

Alas! Just think, my sister, of our father—how
 he perished, hated and in ill-repute, for failings 50
 he himself detected, after he himself
 gouged out his two-fold eyes with self-inflicting hand;¹¹

⁷ The first proclamation was presumably made on the battlefield. Kreon's entrance speech will be an official proclamation to the city as a whole, as represented by the elders of the chorus.

⁸ A proverbial expression of helplessness in face of an insoluble problem.

⁹ This could also mean "by the city," in which case Ismene is equating Kreon with the city as a whole (cf. 79, 905).

¹⁰ Antigone means that she will never betray Polyneices, but from Kreon's point of view she will indeed be "caught in treachery."

¹¹ Sophocles here appears to use a version of the story in which Oidipous stayed at Thebes (rather than being exiled) after blinding himself, and died there (though "perished" might simply mean "was ruined"). In *OC*, he dies at Athens with divine favor.

SERIES EDITORS

James Clauss, *University of Washington*
 Stephen Esposito, *Boston University*

The Focus Classical Library is dedicated to publishing the best of Classical literature in contemporary translations with notes and introductions, so as to provide modern students access to the thought and context at the roots of contemporary culture.

Ruby Blondell is a Professor of Classics at the University of Washington, where she has taught since 1985. She is the author of *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge University Press 2002) and co-author of *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides* (Routledge 1999), for which she translated *Euripides: Medea*. She is also the author (under the name Mary Whitlock Blundell) of *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge University Press 1989).

For the complete list of titles available from Focus Publishing, additional student materials, and online ordering, visit www.pullins.com.

Focus Publishing
 R. Pullins Company
 PO Box 369
 Newburyport, MA 01950
www.pullins.com

ISBN 10: 1-58510-037-4

ISBN 978-158510-037-8

