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Oedipus The King



Synopsis

In the hands of Sophocles, the master dramatist, the anguished tale of a man fated to kill his father and marry his mother retains its power to shock and move beyond any Freudian reference. In this new translation, performed by an outstanding cast led by Michael Sheen, the searing inevitability facing Oedipus proves as shocking as it was 2,500 years ago when it was first presented in the theatre at Athens. Translated by Duncan Steen.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 1 hour and 40 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Naxos AudioBooks

Audible.com Release Date: October 26, 2000

Language: English

ASIN: B0000546ZQ

Best Sellers Rank: #3 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Medieval #84

in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Drama #170 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Ancient & Classical

Customer Reviews

"Oedipus the King" or Oedipus Rex is the world's first great tragedy. Almost everyone knows the tale of the man who murdered his father and married his own mother. The only question is, which translation do you read? Bernard Knox makes an excellent case for his prose translation of Sophocles classic. This is a version designed for the a filmed version meant for the classroom; as such, it is remarkably smooth and easy to read. There is little poetry left in it; if that is what you seek, look elsewhere. This edition comes with a nice set of introductory essays on the background of the play, the theater, and Sophocles. All in all, a nice little edition.

The central statement of Greek tragedy is that Man can not control his Destiny; that there is an ineluctable Fate, preordained and inescapable. No matter how much the poor humans fight against it, it must be fulfilled. And there is no character as tragic as Oedipus in all literature. In this play, we see Oedipus as a successful man who has become King of Thebes, happily married to an older woman named Iocasta. As the play unfolds, we can feel the proximity of something terrible indeed.

When the blind sage Tiresias starts to unfold the true story of Oedipus, we can creepily feel the sheer horror that grips him, as he learns that he has killed his father and married his mother, unknowingly. I have no notice of any other plot that can be described as more tragic than this one. Besides, it is one of the main sources of our culture, as with all true Classics. Oedipus summarizes some of our worst fears and traumas: the need to "kill the paternal figure", the "dependency on our mother", the "impossibility of control external forces that shape our fate". It is horrific and fascinating, and there is simply no way to be indifferent to it.

The only budget series of audio books and recorded drama comes from Naxos. One of their more recent entries is a very modern version of Sophocles' in a translation by Duncan Steen. In fact, some might find it a little too modern with its use of idiomatic expressions such as "You can't pin that on me"--which might be taken as an ironic reference to the final horrible deed of the hero. But when the messenger the agonized Oedipus as calling himself a "mother f..." (although he stops at the "f") the effect is far too "modern" for comfort. You see, given a sound recording, we can only assume that the action is taking place in the nearly prehistoric past. I do not know the tone of Sophocles' Greek; but I do read that it is elegant and decorous. Therefore, I can only assume that this translator is doing his source a great injustice. On the other hand, the dialogue MOVES. There is an excitement to this performance, although the Creon of Adam Kotz lacks some force. Michael Sheen is good in the title role, as is Nichola McAuliffe as Jocasta, Heathcote Williams as the Chorus Leader, and John Moffatt as Tiresias and the Narrator at the start of the recording. The Chorus itself is cut down to four voices, but they are handled nicely with stereo separation and are quite comprehensible. The music is meager but effectively used. All in all, a very good if not perfect attempt at making one of the greatest Western plays accessible to a wide audience.

Oedipus the King is one of the classic works of Western literature. It was originally written as a play in around 429 BC by Sophocles (~496-406 BC), a Greek philosopher and playwright. It took the Greek world by storm, and has been handed down to future generations who have also been greatly influenced by it. Most notably in modern times, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) took this work as pointing toward a deep-rooted psychosis, the Oedipus Complex. Oedipus the King (also known as Oedipus Rex or Oedipus Tyrannus) is the story of Oedipus, the king of Thebes, which is suffering under a horrific plague. Finding out that the god Apollo has laid the plague on the city until it should punish the murderer of its previous king, Oedipus pronounces a curse on the murderer and sets out to discover who the murderer was. Sadly for Oedipus, there is fate upon fate wrapped up in this

mystery, and doom upon doom. This book, is not merely a translation of Oedipus the King, instead it is an acting version, created by the Stratford Shakespearian Festival Company of Canada for High School level students. The book begins with an introduction to Sophocles and Greek theatre, and after the play are copious notes, critical excerpts and questions for discussion. The play itself was written so that a young reader, with no background understanding of Greek theatre or culture will understand it. Overall, I found this to be a great book. I enjoyed the information about the play a lot, and believe that it will be very helpful to any reader. But, foremost, I enjoyed the play itself. The story is powerful, and quite enthralling. I have never seen this play acted out, but do think that this translation would make it excellent. I loved this book, and highly recommend it!

This Oxford translation of "Oedipus the King" is a collaboration between Stephen Berg, a poet, and Diskin Clay, a classicist. It offers excellent commentary, including an interpretive introduction, notes explaining obscurities, an appendix on Greek drama, and a glossary. The translation itself, however, is quite different: the dialogue is given in short, clipped sentences, and the choruses in unpunctuated free verse. Here is Berg's version of the choral lyric from "Oedipus" : "just now / from high snowy Parnassus / the god's voice exploded its blazing message / follow his track find the man / no one knows / a bull loose under wild bushes and trees / among caves and gray rocks" (p. 45). Berg's explanation for this style is that he wants to reproduce the effect of "broken song," and indeed this broken syntax looks much like the Greek on the page. This approach, however, sometimes sacrifices definition and intelligibility -- as in this passage, especially if the words are going to be spoken rather than read.

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