



## The Theban Plays

**Author:** Sophocles (translated by E.F. Watling)

**Genre:** Drama

**Publisher:** London: Penguin, 1947

**ISBN:** 978-0-14-044003-4

**RRP:** £6.99 (+£2.80 p&p)

*One can't get much more 'Old School' than Ancient Greece. And 'old' is by no means a synonym for 'boring' in the case of these stories... they've entertained for over 2000 years.*

It's often said that the British royal family are a 'waste of money'. Well if you do think our little gang of blue-bloods are a bit of a liability (and I don't), imagine how the poor people of Thebes felt. First their less-than-perfect-King gets murdered, and then a scary monster called the Sphinx (yes the one who lives by the Pyramids) comes and lays waste to their lands... He says he'll only stop if someone can solve his riddle... so what to do? Enter the very clever riddle-solving hero: Oedipus.

On his victory over the nasty monster, Oedipus is elected king by the people, and takes 'possession' of the Queen, the crown and all that goes with it, and all seems well. Wow. Great. Democracy in action you might think... sadly though, there's a problem. You see although he didn't know, Oedipus was King of Thebes anyway: his parents were the old King and Queen... the Queen he's just married! Yes, she's actually his mother/wife, his daughters are also his sisters and his sons are also his brothers. (What a mess! Old Queen Liz and her clan don't seem so bad after all now eh?) Thus goes the first of three of the surviving plays of the great playwright Sophocles, a guy so cool even Shakespeare was known to 'borrow' some of his ideas (and those of his friends) for his own arguably better-known stories. The second play sees poor Oedipus, now blind and homeless, being led around by his loyal daughter Antigone. He arrives on the outskirts of Athens looking for sanctuary and the nice friendly Athenians fight the Nasty Thebans over where the poor old ex-king is to be buried. The third and final story of the set (though they were only put together after the author died and were written years apart), sees Antigone die as a martyr when she tries to bury her brother's body against the wishes of the new King (her other brother).

Whatever else they are, then, these stories certainly are not boring. Though they have been acted out by many people over many generations, they are also perfectly good to read as a book – this whole volume of all three is only about 150 pages long. So, don't be put off by a lack of ancient languages... you can have a go of this well translated (and annotated) version and sound like a boffin in hours; your friends will doubtless be impressed.

9 sausages out of 10

RW Sep 2014