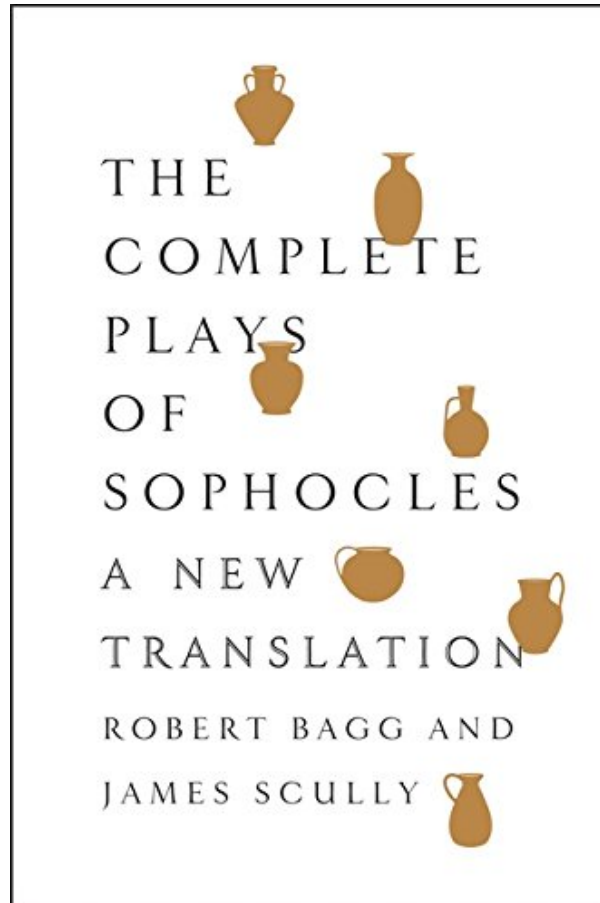
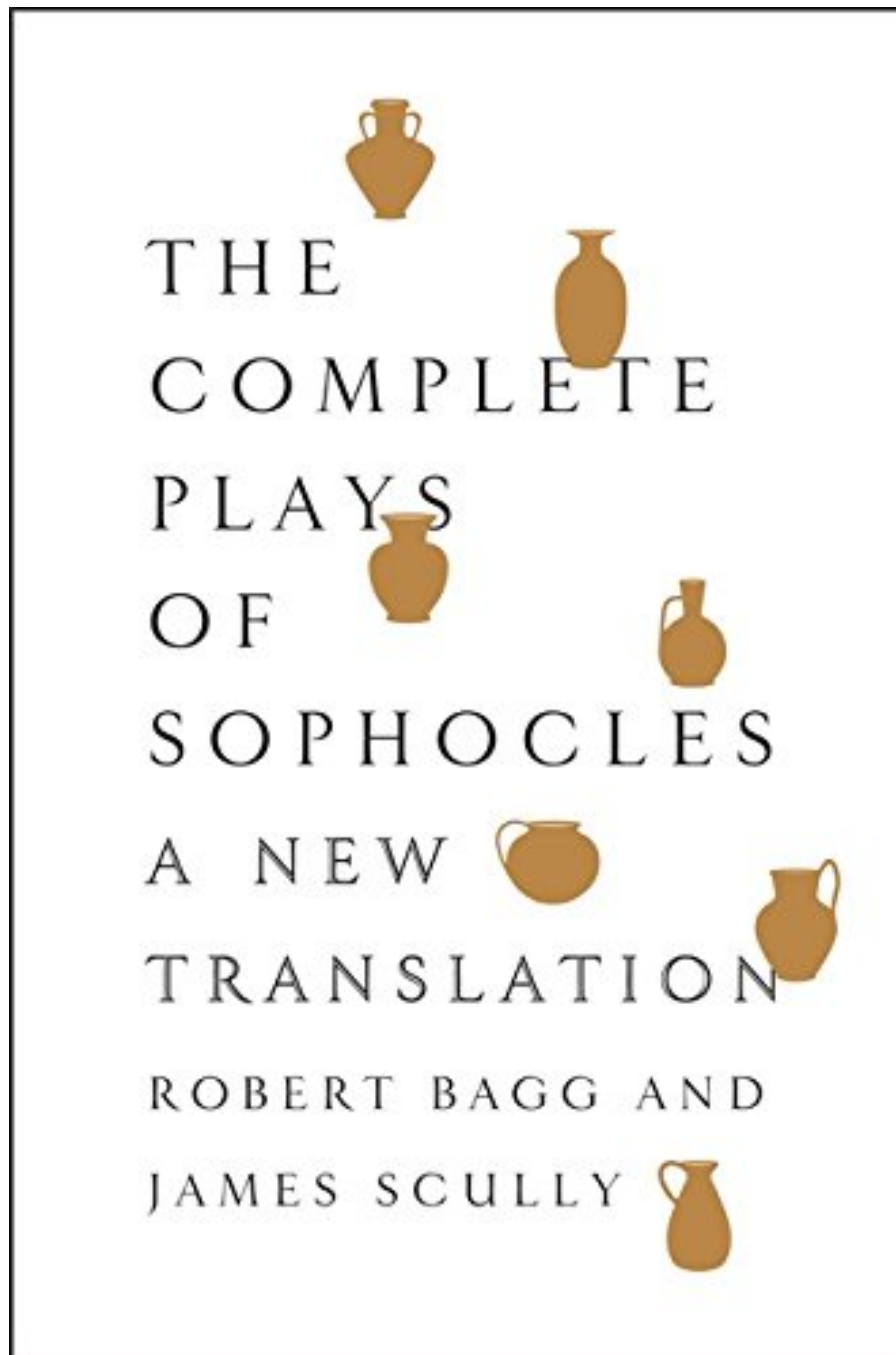


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About the Author

Robert Bagg is the author of five books of poetry, including *Madonna of the Cello*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Prix de Rome, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, NEA, and NEH fellowships have supported his projects. Bagg’s translations of Euripides and Sophocles have been staged in more than 60 productions worldwide. James Scully has published 11 books of poetry, and three book-length

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Award-winning poet-playwrights Robert Bagg and James Scully present a gripping new translation of Western literature's earliest treasures in *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*. In the tradition of Robert Fagles' bestselling translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and retaining the textual authenticity of Richmond Lattimore's *Aeschylus*, Bagg and Scully render Sophocles' dramas accessible and exciting for the modern reader. Students new to Athenian drama, readers of classical literature, and anyone wishing to kindle anew their passion for Greek tragedy will find no more captivating entrance to these milestones of world literature than in Bagg and Scully's *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*.

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Most helpful customer reviews

14 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

An Embellished Recreation of Sophocles's Seven Tragedies

By Rodolfo Lazo de la Vega

Sophocles is one of the central giants of world literature. The great gulf that exists between the great Athenian poet's language and our modern English is vast, making a new translation very much welcome for those hoping, while ignorant of Classical Greek, to bridge the linguistic divide. Having read many translations in the past, I very much looked forward to this one. Unfortunately, the news is not quite what I hoped for. For one, both translators add ridiculous and completely uncalled for stage directions and parentheticals whenever they desire. When the blind and bleeding Oedipus asks Creon to promise him to expel him from the city, Bagg's stage direction reads 'Creon touches Oedipus' hand.' We are told that "Antigone is out of breath" and that "Ismene raises her voice." We are also told that the Choral Leader should speak "sotto voce" to his fellow chorus-members. In Bagg's translation, Oedipus exits into the palace mid-way through Teiresias' revelation rather than at the end. There is absolutely no textual evidence for this reading. Less problematically, the Corinthian is incorrectly called the 'Messenger' although he is not an official messenger from Corinth. Teiresias is made to say something close to (I do not have the words before me), "I will not leave until I have said what you brought me here to say," rather than the more accepted "I will go when I say what I came here to say." The endnotes do not explain this choice.

Although the translators are poets the choral odes are dull. There is no poetry or rhythm to them. The lines during these moments are presented in truncated lines as if this were a substitute for rhythm. The sense of stichomythia is not very strong. Scully's translation of "Aias" adds obscenities which I found unintentionally humorous. We are at one point told that this is done because modern Western society has lost the negative cultural connotations which come with the word 'fox,' but Scully's Aias' suggestion that Odysseus fornicates with foxes isn't a very effective way of re-introducing that cultural connotations. The translators ultimately seem to believe that they are co-creators with the playwright rather than translators. I find little in these translations to recommend them.

Before I come across as completely dismissing this volume I will say that there are numerous aspects which I do very much like. This translation is heavy on endnotes. Sometimes they offers a little more than I thought was needed but I am grateful for what they explain. In a few of the plays I made new discoveries by reading the endnotes (although I found the notes to "Women of Trakhis" lackluster). This volume's "Antigone" contains a MAJOR improvement over other translations of this magnificent play. For that I am very, very glad, ultimately, that this translation exists. Bagg presents an entirely new (to me) reading of an important line. What was once completely perplexing now makes perfect sense. The word 'phusis' means 'nature.' But Bagg, citing the work of Lloyd-Jones and N.G. Wilson, reminds us that it can also be understood to mean 'birth.' Antigone's famous line is thus NOT "It is not my nature to join in hate but only to love." The way this version translate that line is now closer to: "I made no enemies by being born; I made my 'philia' at birth." Many readers have no doubt found themselves perplexed by that line in its former reading but now, thematically, the new reading makes PERFECT sense to me. In the opening line, Antigone refers to Ismene

as 'autadelphon' - 'born like me of the self-same womb.' For Antigone the 'womb' means everything. She fights for the family. Creon's wife, Eurydice, is the "All-Mother" of Haemon. She kills herself in front of an altar cursing Creon for killing her two sons. Thus, "I made no enemies by being born; I made my 'philia' at birth" means just that, her loyalty is to the womb. Those from the womb MAY become enemies later (like Ismene) but only 'philia' originates from the womb. Creon represents the state. Antigone the family. Around and inside both of them, the themes of Love and Death play their part.

Ultimately, these adaptations of Sophocles's plays take too many liberties. The addition of invented stage directions and parentheticals are ridiculous. The language is a bit on the casual side for my taste. The Lattimore and Grene translations, despite their weaknesses, including an almost complete lack of contextual material and endnotes, remain my preferred version of Sophocles.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

when i am nothing, then i am a man

By Westward Hell

"What is unwisdom but the lusting after

longevity: to be old and full of days!"

-Anthony Hecht

About a year and a half ago it dawned on me just how much Greek Tragedy I'd senselessly eluded while studying philosophy and literature at university. I read Plato, and the comic playwright Aristophanes, almost exclusively in pursuit of the 'historical Socrates'. In the process, I ignored the tragic plays for a variety of reasons. Surely, a preconceived notion of tragedy manufactured by a lofty student mind told me I probably did not need whatever Sophocles had to teach me. At least not yet. Those particular student years are long gone, and now that life has accumulated some weighty history of its own I found myself yearning to hear a timeless voice, dark and a little oracular - a voice speaking from the base of humanness. From a pocket of ignorance, I recalled Sophocles. Surfing Amazon and judging books by their covers, I was drawn to this distinguished, clean edition full of all seven plays, recently republished, some plays revised, by two poet/playwrights. I already had prior respect for James Scully's poetry collection, 'Donatello's Version'. Many of these translations, however, belong to Robert Bagg, and I was more than willing to trust him with my first read of this ancient playwright. There is something I prefer about reading translations done by two individuals, especially when one of them is a poet. Also, when I first ordered this book, I remember, too, being motivated to do so after reading one of the translator's generous responses that addressed another reviewer's gripe about some aspect of the book or translation. I appreciated the time he took to respond in kind.

The book. This book is incredibly easy to read - as in, it's comfortable to hold, balance in one hand, turn the pages without creasing the very flexible spine - that is, if books made well enough to withstand several reads and remain in pristine condition is your thing. The font is sizable. I normally wear glasses but could remove them for most all 800+ pages of the text. And the pages welcome marginalia, most excellent for the student of classical literature, actors, or for classics enthusiasts who want to keep notes as they go. There is ample white space which grants the dialogues a poetic white-spaciousness so you can make correlations, map out a genealogy, or compose thesis statements or stage notes without inscribing over or intruding upon the text. (This kind of thing is important to me.) I praise the typesetters, too, for ensuring the quality and configuration of this edition. A remarkable book so far as books go. What's also remarkable is that a book this length weighs as little as it does. Compare it with the house-heavy weight of DeLillo's 'Underworld', similar length.

For someone like me already familiar with the robust, ironic and totally vulgar expressions of Aristophanes, I

knew I wanted one guide for this Sophoclean undertaking. Bagg & Scully's translations are not meant to be a one-time-read and then move on, but they are a darn good starting point. Before moving on to other translations, I'd read the Theban plays three times, and Philoctetes and Electra twice, Aias once. I was trusting these two writers to introduce me to a playwright who I want in my life for the rest of it, to get these characters, structures, archetypes and stories ingrained in my head so that when reading other translations I'd have already established a firm grasp of the action of each play. Bagg & Scully succeeded in spades. Never ever underestimate the gifts of your translators; these works are labors of love, and this edition of a complete plays is nothing shy of devotional.

Quite simply, this edition went above and beyond introducing me to Sophocles. I did embark on reading several other translations and secondary sources. In the year and a half since I read this edition, I've read Robert Fagles, Richard Lattimore, David Grene, Nicholas Rudall's stage adaptations, and very soon I'm looking forward to Seamus Heaney's versions of Antigone and Philoctetes. I was also able to read Bernard Knox's 'The Heroic Temper' with some degree of familiarity and comprehension. Having read several more versions of Sophocles, I can say this with respect to Bagg & Scully: had I begun, instead, with Robert Fagles' translations and branched out, I would be no less impressed with these translations, surely acknowledging their unique fusion of poetic intensity and clarity. And it ought to be intense clarity I go out on.

Thank You, Bagg & Scully, for introducing me to Sophocles and effectively changing my life. I'm not a bit cynical when I say that. I needed his voice in my life. My enormous thanks.

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Accessible and poetic

By Reading Gal

Often, Greek tragedy is inaccessible for the laymen, full of word choice that makes translation a primary goal, rather than a task already completed. Alternatively, translation is so dumbed down that I no longer feel I am reading text meant for a scholar. So Hurray! to Bob Bagg and James Scully, for providing the perfect balance. I found the choral odes to sing to me, and was captured while reading, imaging the production in live format in the expanse of my living room, perched from my all-too-casual reading chair. While partial to Elektra, I share love equally with Oedipus the King. Aias was new to me, and I found surprise within. Certainly not my typical summer reading text, but a wonderful way to start the season!

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