

The Fragmented Stage: Attic Tragedy in the Latin Authors of the Antonine Era

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1. Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 10.1.67-68 (trans. Russell)

Sed longe clarius inlustraverunt hoc opus Sophocles atque Euripides, quorum in dispari dicendi via uter sit poeta melior inter plurimos quaeritur. Idque ego sane, quoniam ad praesentem materiam nihil pertinet, iniudicatum relinquo. Illud quidem nemo non fateatur necesse est, iis qui se ad agendum comparant utiliore longe fore Euripiden. Namque is et sermone (quod ipsum reprehendunt quibus gravitas et coturnus et sonus Sophocli videtur esse sublimior) magis accedit oratorio generi, et sententiis densus, et in iis quae a sapientibus tradita sunt paene ipsis par, et in dicendo ac respondendo cuilibet eorum qui fuerunt in foro disertis comparandus, in adfectibus vero cum omnibus mirus, tum in iis qui miseratione constant facile praecipuus.

But far more distinction was brought to this genre by Sophocles and Euripides. Their styles are very different, and there is much dispute as to which is the better poet. I leave this question unresolved, because it has nothing to do with my present subject. What everybody must admit is that Euripides will be much the more useful to persons preparing themselves to plead in court. His language (censured by some who find Sophocles' dignity, tragic grandeur, and resonance more sublime) is closer to the norm of oratory; he is full of striking thoughts (*sententiae*), and almost a match for the philosophers in expressing their teaching; his technique of speech and debate is comparable to that of anyone who has been famous for eloquence in the courts; and finally he is marvellous at expressing any emotion, and far and away the supreme master of the power to arouse pity.

2. Fronto *Ep. ad Marcum* 63, 23-26 VdH (Aurelius to Fronto; trans. Haines)

Adventum tuum mihi frater tuus nuper εὐηγγελίσατο. Cupio mehercule possis venire, quod salute tua fiat. Spero enim fore ut etiam valetudini meae conspectus tuus aliquid contollat: εἰς ὄμματ' εὖνου φωτὸς ἐμβλέψαι γλυκύ, Euripides ait, opinor.

Your brother but now brought me the good news of your arrival. Heaven knows I long for you to be able to come, if only your health will allow of it, for I hope that the sight of you may do something for my health also. 'Sweet 'tis to look into a friend's kind eyes,' as Euripides, I take it, says."

3. Fronto *Ep. ad Marcum* 49, 18-22 VdH (trans. Haines)

meministi autem tu plurimas lectiones,
quibus usque adhuc versatus es,
comoedias, Atellan<a>s, oratores veteres,
quorum aut pauci aut praeter Catonem et
Gracchum nemo tubam inflat ; omnes
autem mugiunt vel stridunt potius. Quid
igitur Ennius egit, quem legisti? Quid
tragoediae ad versum sublimiter
faciendum te iuverunt?

But you remember the numbers of books,
of which you have up to the present made
the acquaintance, comedies, faces, old-
time orators, few of whom, perhaps none
save Cato and Gracchus, blow a trumpet,
but all bellow or, rather, shriek. What,
then, has Ennius done for you now you
have read him? What help have the
tragedies been to you in composing verse
in the grand style?

4. Apuleius *Apol.* 37 (trans. Jones)

Sophocles poeta Euripidi aemulus et
superstes, vixit enim ad extremam
senectam, cum igitur accusaretur a filio
suomet dementiae, quasi iam per aetatem
desiperet, protulisse dicitur *Coloneum*
suam, peregre iam tragoediarum, quam
forte tum in eo tempore conscribat, eam
iudicibus legisse nec quicquam amplius
pro defensione sua addidisse, nisi ut
audacter dementiae condemnarent, si
carmina senis displicerent. Ibi ego
comperior omnes iudices tanto poetae
adsurrexisse, miris laudibus eum tulisse ob
argumenti sollertiam et coturnum
facundiae, nec ita multum omnis afuisse
quin accusatorem potius dementiae
condemnarent.

Sophocles, a poet who rivaled and outlived
Euripides, for he reached extreme old
age—well, when his own son accused him
of dementia, alleging that his age was now
making him foolish, they say he brought
out his *Oedipus at Colonus*, that tragic
masterpiece, which he was just then
writing. He read this out to the jurors, and
said nothing further in his defense except
that they should go ahead and
unhesitatingly find him guilty of dementia
if they disliked this poem of his old age.
At that point, so I find, all the judges rose
to applaud the great poet, and showered
extraordinary praise on him for the artistry
of the plot and the elevation of the
language, while they were all very near to
condemning his accusers for dementia
instead.

5. Gellius *NA* 6.5.6 (trans. Rolfe)

Ita compositum fabulae argumentum est,
ut veluti fratris reliquias ferens Electra
complotet commisereturque interitum
eius existimatum

The plot of the play requires that Electra,
who is represented as carrying her
brother's remains, should lament and
bemoan the fate that she believed had
overtaken him.

6. Gellius NA 13.19 (trans. Rolfe)

(1) Versus est notae vetustatis senarius:

Σοφοὶ τύραννοι τῶν σοφῶν ξυνουσία.

(2) Eum versus Plato in *Theaeteto* Euripidi esse dicit. Quod quidem nos admodum miramur; nam scriptum eum legimus in tragoedia Sophocli quae inscripta est Αἴας Λοκρός, prior autem natus fuit Sophocles quam Euripides. (3) Sed etiam ille versus non minus notus:

Γέρων γέροντα παιδαγωγήσω σ' ἐγώ,

et in tragoedia Sophocli scriptus est, cui titulus est Φθιώτιδες, et in *Bacchis* Euripidi. (4) Id quoque animadvertimus, apud Aeschylum ἐν τῷ Πυρφόρῳ Προμηθεῖ et apud Euripidem in tragoedia quae inscripta est Ἴνώ, eundem esse versus absque paucis syllabis. Aeschylus sic:

Σιγῶν θ' ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγων τὰ καίρια,

Euripides ita:

Σιγᾶν θ' ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν ἴν' ἀσφαλές.

Fuit autem Aeschylus non brevi antiquior.

There is an iambic trimeter verse of notorious antiquity:

By converse with the wise wax tyrants wise.

This verse Plato in his *Theaetetus* attributes to Euripides. I am very much surprised at this; for I have met it in the tragedy of Sophocles entitled *Ajax the Locrian*, and Sophocles was born before Euripides. But the following line is equally well known:

I who am old shall lead you, also old.

And this is found both in a tragedy of Sophocles, of which the title is *Phthiotides* and in the *Bacchae* of Euripides. I have further observed that in the *Fire-bringing Prometheus* of Aeschylus and in the tragedy of Euripides entitled *Ino* an identical verse occurs, except for a few syllables. In Aeschylus it runs thus:

When proper, keeping silent, and saying what is fit.

In Euripides thus:

When proper, keeping silent, speaking when 'tis safe.

But Aeschylus was considerably the earlier writer.

7. Gellius NA 19.10.12 (=Enn. tr. fr. 99 Jocelyn)

Quocirca statim proferri *Iphigeniam* Q. Enni iubet. In eius tragoediae choro inscriptos esse hos versus legimus:

otio qui nescit uti,

plus negoti habet quam, cum est negotium, in negotio.

nam cui, quod agat, institutum in otio est negotium,

id agit, <id> studet, ibi mentem atque animum delectat suum;

otioso in otio animus nescit quid velit.

hoc idem est; em neque domi nunc nos nec militiae sumus:

imus huc, hinc illuc; cum illuc ventum est, ire illinc lubet.

incerte errat animus, praeterpropter vitam vivitur.

As a result [Celsinus] immediately ordered that the *Iphigenia* of Ennius be brought out. We read these verses written in a chorus of that tragedy:

He who does know to use leisure

has more difficulty in the work at hand when there is work.

For he who has a task set which he must do in leisure

does it, he busies himself with it, he delights his mind and spirit in it;
the mind of an idle man in idleness does not know what it wants.
This is the same; for now we are neither at home nor on campaign:
we go here, from here we go; when we arrive there, it pleases to depart.
The mind wanders aimlessly; more or less our life is lived.

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