

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

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were central to the learned culture of the second century CE, particularly among the Greeks, for whom these authors and their genre remained pillars of the educational tradition (Webb). Romans of the Republic and early Principate demonstrated similar enthusiasm: Republican authors readily adapted tragedies into Latin plays (Gildenhard), and in the first century CE tragedy appears in Statius' enunciation of his father's *doctrina* (*Silv.* 5.3.89-103) and Quintilian's canon (*Inst. Or.* 10.1.66-68), to say nothing of Seneca's own plays. Yet, by the second century Latin authors had shifted away from Athenian tragedy: in contrast to our Greek sources, who reflect a continuing interest in the canonical playwrights and a desire to fashion new works within this tradition, Romans all but cease to draw upon Attic tragedy and instead turned their attention to Republican drama (Holford-Strevens 1999, 2003).

While Roman use of these poets is heavily curtailed relative to their Greek contemporaries and this generally diminished importance can be attributed to shifting educational priorities at Rome, these texts and their authors nevertheless represent important touchstones of Greek literature for Antonine Romans. In this paper, I survey the references to the canonical Attic tragedians in the Latin authors of the Antonine age and argue that while tragic quotation often focused on *sententiae* and other lines with easily extractable morals, these texts still served as key sites for honing one's critical practice on a Greek model that can then be applied to literature more broadly.

Fronto is silent on the tragedians, and his single reference to the genre (*Ep. ad Marc.* 3.17.3) is part of a discussion of rhetorical style; his correspondent Marcus cites

decontextualized lines as moral *sententiae* (*Med.* 11.6) in a manner more typical of his contemporaries. Apuleius includes a single reference to Sophocles' life (*Apol.* 37), though the episode is filtered through Cicero. By contrast, Aulus Gellius displays more robust engagement, freely incorporating tragic fragments as well as anecdotes about staging and biography into his miscellany (Heusch). He includes references to all three tragedians, albeit with clear preference for Euripides and Sophocles. While he may have lacked firsthand knowledge of these plays (even his most extensive quotations, e.g. *NA* 6.16.6, suggest that he worked with an anthology), he nevertheless uses tragedy as a site for negotiating between Greek and Roman critical models.

For instance, *NA* 13.19, compares several lines from each tragedian while reporting Plato's misattribution of a verse to Euripides. Although the parallels may have already been well-known in the Greek world, Gellius presents his reading in the comparative mold of Dio *Or.* 52 (cf. Vardi). This practice can in turn be used to link the *NA* to the Latin literary tradition, as in the case of a citation of Euripides at 1.15.17, which is part of a broader nexus of allusive citations in the passage. In this respect his treatment of Greek tragedy aligns with his own use of Roman republican drama, which he cites more readily and integrates deeply into his intellectual program (nowhere more clearly than at *NA* 19.10.12, in which an Ennian fragment is central to the action and message). Even if Roman Republican drama was preferred in the second century, and Latin authors of the Antonine period may have only encountered Attic tragedy at a remove, the genre nevertheless remained productive for Antonine Romans as a venue for honing their critical approach and mediating Hellenic models into an appropriately Romanized form.

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