'Translated word-for-word'?

Re-examining the relationship between Greek and Roman Republican tragedy

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The relationship between the plays of Ennius, Accius and the other Roman Republican tragedians and their ancient Greek predecessors is one of the central concerns and ongoing questions in this field. Typically in my own research I am looking backwards, so to speak, from the Roman Republican tragedies to, principally, the Greek tragedies of the Attic stage written by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. This is also the stance in which most research into Roman Republican tragedy is done. But it's also possible to give a slightly different narrative which is about looking forward from Greek tragedy to Roman tragedy. Whichever starting point, I will touch on a story that combines both a search for origins and the possibilities of creative transformation.

I will start with some stage-setting, to quickly express a little of the relative wealth of knowledge we have about ancient Greek drama, and make some observations about the relative poverty of what we know about early Roman tragedy. Secondly, I will try and illustrate some of the processes of creative transformation that we can place under the umbrella term of 'translation', particularly those that illustrate the collision of Greek and Roman culture. And finally, I will demonstrate an example where that idea of translation suddenly seems rather shaky, and in the process that will hopefully give a taste of both how little we know, and how dependent we are for that scarce knowledge on the tangled threads of tradition that stretch all the way back to antiquity.

So, starting with Greece, let me try to very briefly sum up some things we know about Attic tragedy. The earliest years are a bit murky, but at least by the fifth century, performances of tragedy were the central part of the Dionysia, an Athenian civic festival. The performances were competitive and three playwrights successively took their turns to present a trilogy of tragedies and a satyr play in the open air before the eyes of thousands of their fellow-citizens.

Attic tragedy included not just spoken dialogue but also sung choral dances. The familiar names of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides all competed with their plays over many years in the Dionysia. We still have many of these plays today.

But what of Roman Republican drama? We know so much less. Livius Andronicus, who traditionally inaugurated literature in Rome by producing a translation of Homer's Odyssey in Latin, was also credited with being the first person to stage tragedy in Latin, in 240BC, if we trust the Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero writing two hundred years later. 240BC was the year after Rome had burst onto the world stage by triumphing over its North African rival city-state, Carthage, in the first Punic War. It has been strongly argued by Denis Feeney (2016) that this date is not coincidence, but rather that the rise of Roman tragedy seems tied to Rome's growing influence in the Mediterranean.

Livius was the first of many Roman tragic writers, but a playwright is fortunate if we have any fragments of theirs surviving. What does survive is heavily biased towards a select bunch. If there's an obvious big three in Attic tragedy, we should probably talk about a big five in Roman Republican tragedy: Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius –these three were also writers of the first epic poems in Latin – , Pacuvius and Accius. For Livius Andronicus, we know the titles of 9 of his tragedies; for Naevius, 7; for Ennius, 20; for Pacuvius, 12; for Accius, 47. Nearly one hundred plays – enough to talk about, surely? But here we hit the big problem with Roman Republican tragedy. Only a tiny fraction of what was once written and performed survives. Now, that's true of Greek tragedy too – the amount of plays produced and performed at the Dionysia in Athens each year, not to mention other dramatic festivals, not just in Athens but around the Greek world, is far greater than the plays we have left. But at least with Greek tragedy, we have a few complete plays. We don't have a single complete Roman Republican tragedy by anybody. The only surviving complete Roman tragedies are by Seneca, but they're written a hundred years after the fall of the Roman Republic, under the emperors Claudius and Nero.

There are Greek tragedies that survive in fragments, sometimes because a later writer like Stobaeus decided to quote a Sophoclean or Euripidean line, but often through papyrus scraps from rubbish heaps in Oxyrhynchus or other spots in Egypt. That means that often we get quite lengthy passages from a lost Euripidean work, perhaps also the complete hypothesis or plot summary. That simply isn't the case for the Roman Republican tragedies. Our 'fragments' do not come to us as papyrus scraps, but always as quotations embedded in other works, such as speeches by Cicero from the end of the Roman Republic and a vast array of grammatical texts written over the course of several centuries of the Roman Empire into Late Antiquity and beyond.

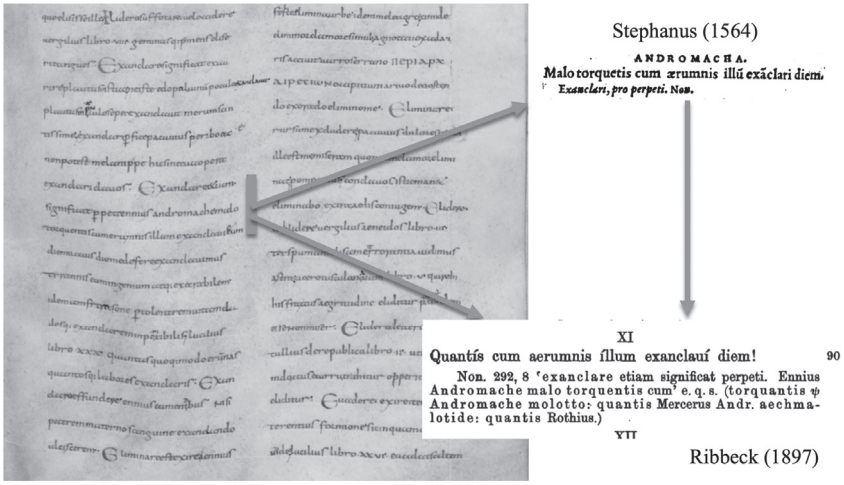
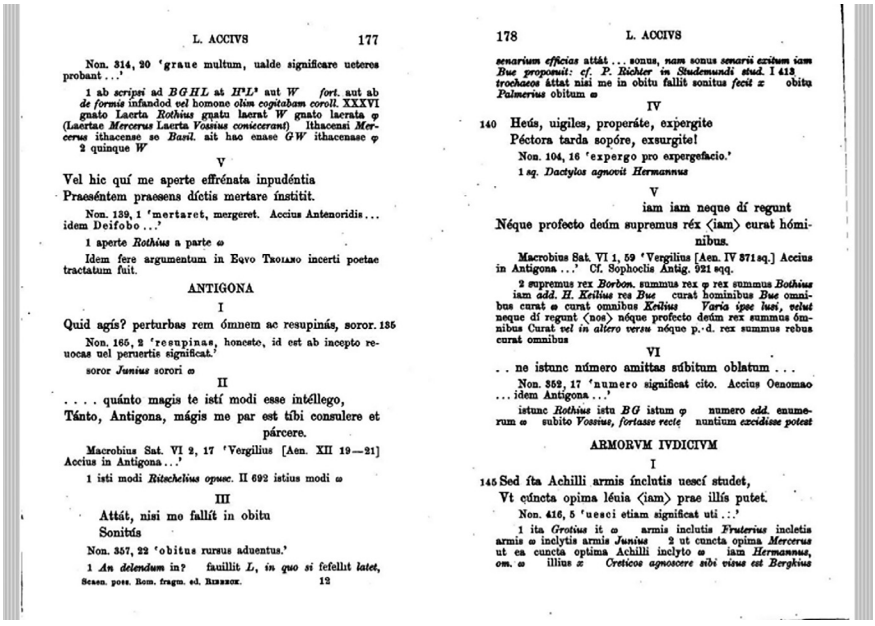


Figure 1. Excerpt of a ninth-century manuscript of Nonius Marcellus' *De compendiosa doctrina* (139r) (Credit: Leiden University Libraries, VLF 73) with corresponding excerpts of Stephanus' and Ribbeck's editions of the tragic fragments.

What does this look like in practice? Fig. 1 is a page from a manuscript of the dictionary of Nonius Marcellus, a North African grammarian who lived in the 4th or 5th century AD, we're not entirely sure. This manuscript is a ninth century copy of the work made at Tours in the Abbey of Marmoutier during Alcuin's abbacy under the supervision of the famous scholar Lupus of Ferrières. In his work Nonius Marcellus collects examples of all kinds of unusual words. On this page, you can see in capital E various words which are then defined and followed by quotations from various works, with which Nonius intends to both illustrate and prove these definitions. I've highlighted the entry for *exanclare*, which Nonius defines as *perpeti*, 'to endure'. The first quotation Nonius cites is from Ennius' *Andromache*. Fig. 1 also shows two examples of how this quotation then appears in an edition of the tragic fragments. At the top is how the fragment is presented in Stephanus' edition from early modern Geneva. At the bottom is how the fragment appears in the third edition of the tragic fragments by Otto Ribbeck in late nineteenth century Germany. There is lots more that can be said about quotation and transmission by different authors, but for our purpose it is important to remember that the fragments all survive only because they were quoted by other authors, and thus survive because they were embedded inside other texts.

What does this look like on a quantitative level? Figs. 2 and 3 give a comparison of what survives of Sophocles' *Antigone* and Accius' *Antigone*. There's about fifty lines from Sophocles' *Antigone* on each of these pages. Together they total around 1350 lines. We have the entirety of the play, all its dialogue,

Figure 2. Sophocles' *Antigone* (1353 lines).



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Non. 314, 20 'graue multum, ualde significare ueteres probant ...'

1 ab *scripsi* ad *BGHL* at *H*²*L*¹ aut *W* *fort.* aut ab *de formis* infandod *vel* homone *olim cogitabam coroll.* XXXVI gnato Laerta *Rothius* gnatu laerat *W* gnato lacrata φ (Laertae *Mercerus* Laerta *Vossius conieceranl*) ithacensi *Mercerus* ithacense se *Basil.* ait hac enase *GW* ithacenase φ 2 quinque *W*

V

Vel hic quí me aperte effrénata inpudéntia
Praesséntem praesens dictis mertare ínstitit.

Non. 139, 1 'mertaret, mergeret. Accius Antenoridis ... idem Deifobo ...'

1 aperte *Rothius* a parte ω

Idem fere argumentum in Eqvo Troiano incerti poetae tractatum fuit.

ANTIGONA

I

Quid agís? perturbas rem ómnem ac resupinás, soror. 135

Non. 165, 2 'resupinas, honesto, id est ab incepto reuocas uel peruertis significat.'

soror *Junius* sorori ω

II

. . . . quánto magis te istí modi esse intéllego,
Tánto, Antigona, mágis me par est tíbi consulere et párcere.

Macrobius Sat. VI 2, 17 'Vergilius [Aen. XII 19—21] Accius in Antigona ...'

1 isti modi *Ritschelius opusc.* II 692 istius modi ω

III

Attát, nisi mo fallít in obitu
Sonitús

Non. 357, 22 'obitus rursus aduentus.'

1 *An delendum* in? fauillit *L*, *in quo si* fefellit *latet*,

Scaen. poes. Rom. fragm. ed. Ribbeck. 12

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senarium efficias attát ... sonus, *nam* sonus *senarii exitum iam Bue proponit: cf. P. Richter in Studemundi stud.* I 413 *trochaeos* áttat nisi me in obitu fallit sonitus *fecit x* obitu *Palmerius* obitum ω

IV

Heús, uigiles, properáte, expergite
Péctora tarda sopóre, exsurgite!

Non. 104, 16 'expergo pro expergefacio.'

1 *sq. Dactylos agnovit Hermannus*

V

iam iam neque dí regunt
Néque profecto deúm supremus réx ⟨iam⟩ curat hóminibus.

Macrobius Sat. VI 1, 59 'Vergilius [Aen. IV 371 sq.] Accius in Antigona ...' Cf. Sophoclis Antig. 921 sqq.

2 supremus rex *Borbon.* summus rex φ rex summus *Bothius* iam *add. H. Keilius* res *Bue* curat hominibus *Bue* omnibus curat ω curat omnibus *Keilius* *Varia ipse iuci, velut* neque dí regunt ⟨nos⟩ néque profecto deúm rex summus ómnibus Curat *vel in altero versu* néque p.·d. rex summus rebus curat omnibus

VI

. . ne istunc número amittas súbitum oblatum . . .

Non. 352, 17 'numero significat cito. Accius Oenomao ... idem Antigona ...'

istunc *Bothius* istu *BG* istum φ numero *edd.* enumerum ω subito *Vossius, fortasse recte* nuntium *excidisse potest*

ARMORVM IVDICIVM

I

Sed íta Achilli armis ínclutis uescí studet,
Vt cúncta opima léuia ⟨iam⟩ prae illís putet.

Non. 416, 5 'uesci etiam significat uti ...'

1 ita *Grotius* it ω armis inclutis *Fruterius* incletis armis ω inclytis armis *Junius* 2 ut cuncta opima *Mercerus* ut ea cuncta optima Achilli inclyto ω iam *Hermannus*, om. ω illius *x* *Creticos agnoscere sibi visus est Bergkius*

Figure 3. Accius' *Antigone*, as printed in Ribbeck (1897).

all its choruses. Since we only invented film in the twentieth century, we don't have evidence for some of the aspects of performance, but since we at least have the complete texts of Sophocles' play, we can still draw inferences about how it was performed as well. On the other hand, of Accius' *Antigone* we have six fragments. This play would have been, we imagine, of a comparable length to Sophocles' play, and yet if all we have is these six fragments we have less than a hundredth of it. And this is the story of every Republican Roman tragedy. We are looking at a story of catastrophic loss.

Why would anyone try to read these scraps of Roman tragedy, when one can read full plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides? There are quite a few different reasons to do so, and I will suggest some here.

The first is to get a glimpse of the origins of Roman literature. Republican tragedy planted seeds which we can see sprouted in the works of Catullus, Lucretius, Virgil and a host of other great Roman authors. We only have to read a few words from the fifth century writer Macrobius to realise the great shadow that Ennius cast over Vergil's work, for instance.

We can also look at what this very early chapter tells us about the interaction between Greece and Rome. The writers of early Latin literature were hugely influenced by their Greek predecessors. According to Aulus Gellius, Ennius famously declared he had three hearts, Oscan, Greek, and Latin (*Quintus Ennius tria corda habere sese dicebat, quod loqui Graece et Osce et Latine sciret*, *Noctes Atticae* 17.17.1). This saying also highlights that our early writers are so often intermediaries, 'in-between people', so to speak. As Cicero tells it in his dialogue *Brutus*, Livius Andronicus was a Greek from Tarentum, who was brought to Rome by a Roman general as a slave after the fall of Tarentum in 272 BC. Romans such as Cicero saw their literary origins as beginning with translation, the importing of Greek culture into Rome. It seems no coincidence that at the same time Rome was conquering the Greek world, very visibly and physically bringing Greek culture into the heart of Rome in the form of statuary and other kinds of art, taken from Greek cities, in the festivals hosted and funded by Roman aristocrats, playwrights were staging very Greek-looking plays. Roman translation of Greek works often has a competitive, even aggressive element, as Siobhan McElduff has pointed out (McElduff 2013: 73-78, 101-3). Alongside the tragic fragments we also have some fragments of so-called *fabulae praetextae*, which staged stories about Roman heroes, from the very distant and semi-mythic past, such as Brutus who slew the tyrant Tarquin, as well as rather more recent events such as major military campaigns. But the scarcity of fragments that survive of this genre suggest that it might well have not been that popular. We have vastly more of the *fabulae crepidatae*, or 'plays in Greek dress', whose titles, plots and characters would all have been marvellously Greek to a Roman audience, even if they were in Latin.

Which brings us to one of the most interesting things about Roman Republican tragedy. If these were translations of Greek tragedies, they are also transformations of them. We often nowadays set up a dichotomy between translation, where we expect a translated text to cross a linguistic boundary but otherwise stick rather closely to the text it translates, and adaptation, where we expect something rather looser, a greater creativity in the new text. Such an opposition is rather alien to the Roman world. The concept of translation to a Roman – and there are a whole host of words and terms that mean 'to translate' – could

embrace both something very literal and word-for-word and something that took quite creative liberties.[1]

Translation, even when it is linguistically close, is still an opportunity for cross cultural transformation. Ingo Gildenhard highlights a good example from Ennius' *Medea*, a fragment which survives because it was quoted by Varro (*De lingua Latina* 6.81)[2]

> Ab eodem est quod ait Medea:
> ter sub armis malim uitam cernere
> quam semel modo parere [= *TrRF* II F93]
> quod, ut decernunt de uita eo tempore, multorum uidetur uitae finis.
>
> *From the same source is that which Medea says:*
> *I would prefer to risk my life three times under arms,*
> *than to give birth just once*
> *Because, when men 'determine' about life on that occasion, many lives are seen to end.*

In many ways, it is a close translation of Euripides' *Medea* (lines 248-51):

> Λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον
> ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους, οἱ δὲ μάρνανται δορί,
> κακῶς φρονοῦντες· ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα
> στῆναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ.
>
> *Men say that we live a life free from danger at home while they fight with the spear. How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once.* (trans. Kovacs)

In both plays, Medea talks about how she would rather repeatedly fight in battle than have to give birth once. Ennius uses the words *sub armis* to render Euripides' παρ' ἀσπίδα στῆναι. To translate the phrases, Ennius' Medea would rather stand 'under arms' than 'stand with a shield' as the Medea of Euripides declares. Why this change? As Gildenhard observes, Euripides is writing for an Athenian audience in the fifth century, whose soldiers would fight in a phalanx formation, a tight shield wall where the shield of each soldier also covered the fellow-soldier to his left. By contrast, Ennius' Roman audience would have been familiar with a far looser battle formation, where soldiers could be expected to operate slightly more independently of the soldier next to them.

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1 See McElduff (2013) 189-96 for a list of different terminology used for translation.

2 See Gildenhard (2010) 174-5. The text used for the Ennian fragments is Manuwald (2012) [=*TrRF* II] and translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

War is not the only area where playwrights had to reinterpret Greek source texts for their Roman target audience. Ennius' *Iphigenia* seems to have begun with a description of the constellations in the night sky, just like Euripides' *Iphigeneia* where they feature in a long speech by Agamemnon that opens the play. I've also included the context here because Varro, who transmits the line, is also interested in it for what it illustrates about the different terms that Greeks and Romans have for the same things (Varro *De lingua Latina* 7.73-4):

[73] [Ennius:] quid noctis uidetur? in altisono
caeli clipeo temo superat
stellas sublime<n> agens etiam
atque etiam noctis iter [= *TrRF* II 83]

[Varro:] Hic multam noctem ostendere uolt a temonis motu…[74] eius signa sunt quod has septem stellas Graeci ut <H>omerus uoca<n>t ἅμαξαν et propinquum eius signum βοώτην, nostri eas septem stellas <t>r<i>ones et temonem et prope eas axem…

[Ennius:] What of the night is seen? In the high-sounding shield of the sky, the wagon pole, above all the stars, advancing from on high again and again the course of the night
[Varro:] Here he [Ennius] wishes to indicate that the night is advanced, from the motion of the 'wagon-pole'… The marks of this one are, that the Greeks, for example Homer, call these seven stars the 'wagon' and the sign that is next to it the Ploughman, while our countrymen call these seven stars the 'plough-oxen' and the 'wagon-pole' and near them the 'axle' (tr. Kent)

But what is interesting is that Ennius has actually changed the constellation from Euripides (*Iphigineia in Aulis* 6-11):

Τίς ποτ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἀστὴρ ὅδε πορθμεύει
σείριος ἐγγὺς τῆς ἑπταπόρου
Πλειάδος ἄσσων ἔτι μεσσήρης;
οὔκουν φθόγγος γ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ὀρνίθων
οὔτε θαλάσσης· σιγαὶ δ᾽ ἀνέμων
τόνδε κατ᾽ Εὔριπον ἔχουσιν.

What in the world is this baleful star that glides still high in the sky near the seven Pleiades? No sound at any rate either from the birds or from the sea. A silence of winds holds sway along the Euripus here. (trans. Kovacs)

Ennius' and Euripides' passages are far from exactly the same. But I want to focus on this difference between the Pleiades in Euripides and the Plough in Ennius.

For a start, they're actually in completely different places in the sky. In Ennius, the reference to Ursa Major (the Plough) seems to concern the time of night – it is late indeed. So too in Euripides. But they use different constellations to do that, and that must be because their respective audiences would have used different constellations for this purpose too. If Ennius had just translated Euripides word-for-word and had his character speak of the Pleiades, his Roman audience would have mistaken the point and thought that the emphasis was not on the time of night but on the time of year.[3] This seems a pretty simple yet clear case where the new cultural context required a transformation if it was to make any sense to its new audience. It is a somewhat trivial and yet revealing example of Cicero's principle that the Roman tragedians translated *non uerba sed uim* – not the exact words but their force.[4]

Those are a few examples where we can see translation from Greek tragedy to Roman tragedy as something a bit more involved than a purely linguistic activity. But I want finally to pivot slightly from the Roman playwrights themselves to us modern scholars who go about trying to piece together and interpret their work. Inevitably we often use the much better surviving Greek tragedies to make more sense of the fragments of the Roman tragedies. Sometimes this works very well. Sometimes it's a bit of a wild goose chase. And sometimes it can be downright misleading. I want to show an example from Ennius' *Iphigenia*. In this example, I'm interested in how scholars have gone about reconstructing what might be going on in a fragment and what is its context.

Here is a fragment from Ennius' *Iphigenia* quoted by the Vergilian commentator Servius to illustrate the use of the word *uastus* in Virgil's *Aeneid*:[5]

quae nunc abs te uiduae et uastae uirgines sunt

maidens who now are widowed and abandoned by you

It concerns some *uirgines*, virgin girls, who are now, according to the speaker, widowed and abandoned by her addressee. It's really quite cryptic and, as can be seen in Fig. 4, there's no critical consensus about who the speaker might be, who the addressee might be, and what the line as a whole might be about.

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3 Jocelyn (1967) 329: 'In Classical Roman poetry, on the other hand, whatever the position of the observer, the position of the Bear seems regularly to fix the time of night and that of the Pleiades the season of the year.'

4 Cf. Cicero *Academica* 1.10.

5 Servius *auctus ad* V. *Aen.* 1.52 = *TrRF* II F88.

Editor / critic (in chronological order)	Speaker	Addressee	Subject	Parallels offered with Euripides
Bothe	Clytemnestra	Agamemnon	Initiating the Trojan War	None
Düntzer	-	Helen in apostrophe	Greek girls made widows by the war	1136ff.
Ribbeck	Iphigenia	Helen	Iphigenia's own fate	1334f.
Vahlen	Agamemnon	Clytemnestra	Clytemnestra's other daughters	735-7
Warmington	Agamemnon	Clytemnestra	Clytemnestra's other daughters	735-7 (following Vahlen)
Drabkhin	Agamemnon	Clytemnestra		None
Jocelyn	Clytemnestra	Agamemnon	Iphigenia's death	(1146ff.)
Segura	Agamemnon			None
Traglia	Agamemnon	Clytemnesta	Clytemnestra's other daughters	737

Fig. 4. Table of suggestions made about *TrRF* II F88.

For instance, Bothe thought the speaker might be Clytemnestra and she might be addressing her husband, the Greek general Agamemnon. She is blaming him for starting the Trojan War. But quite a few editors and critics have suggested the opposite, that it might be Agamemnon blaming Clytemnestra, because she has left her other daughters all alone at home by sailing to Aulis with Iphigenia. Meanwhile Ribbeck offered a different suggestion, that the speaker is actually Iphigenia, who is apostrophising Helen, rather than speaking to any character on stage. On this suggestion, Iphigenia is blaming Helen for the whole dramatic situation that has brought about her death, and speaking of herself in a generalising plural. What might give rise to these different hypotheses? When we look at the last column, the parallels these editors see with passages of the Euripidean text, it seems that it is really these parallels that shape the reconstructions of editors and critics.

Moreover, critics who prefer the same Euripidean parallel pretty much uniformly offer the same reconstruction, which perhaps isn't hugely surprising. But the different parallels really are very different – for instance, a choral passage rather than dialogue spoken in iambic trimeters. These different parallels aren't similar at all, in content, delivery or context.

The fact that different critics can point to wildly different parallels for the same Roman tragic fragment means that this process of reconstruction is far from simple. Imperfect correspondences driven by the Roman playwright's own creative transformations is the story of Roman tragedy, and another illustration of the fascination posed by the Roman tragic fragments as well as their challenges.

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