THE OVERSUBTLE MAXIM CHASERS:
Aristophanes, Euripides, and
their Reciprocal Pursuit of
Poetic Identity

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In this dissertation, I explore the intertextual dialogue between two fifth-century Attic playwrights, the comedian Aristophanes and the tragedian Euripides, and the influence that each had on the development of the other’s characteristic style, or ‘brand’ (χαρακτήρ). Scholarship on the two playwrights has tended to focus almost exclusively on the transgression of generic boundaries. But studies of paratragedy and parody in Aristophanic comedy and comic elements in late Euripidean tragedy fail to take into consideration the fact that in addition to appropriating material widely across genres, Aristophanes and Euripides also seem to have shared a specific mutual interest in each other’s work. I propose a refinement to the traditional model and argue that the two playwrights mutually drew inspiration from each other’s differing interpretations of similar themes and motifs.

Over the period of two decades, the comedian and the tragedian gradually expanded a common repertoire from which they responsively developed variations on the same themes. Each sequence of variations on a theme begins with an Aristophanic running gag mocking a recurring tendency in Euripides’ tragedies. Euripides tended to respond to Aristophanes’ variations on his themes by embracing and continuing to employ the tropes that Aristophanes had singled out as being characteristically Euripidean. My study focuses primarily on Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae* and Euripides’ *Helen* and *Bacchae*. I argue that this exploration of shared thematic material was for both Aristophanes and Euripides an endeavor that was especially productive of their unique brands.
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In a famous fragment, the comedian Cratinus refers to a hypothetical hostile audience member as a ‘Euripidaristophanizer’.\textsuperscript{1} The existence of this portmanteau hints at a fact central to the interpretation of the works of both Aristophanes and Euripides: it is impossible to study either playwright without making reference to the other. Although other comedians also used paratragedy and tragic parody, Aristophanes’ obsessive focus on a single living tragedian was an unusual choice that had significant ramifications for the works of both playwrights.\textsuperscript{2} Much of Aristophanes’ mockery of Euripides consists in pointing out idiosyncratic features and recurring themes in the tragedian’s works, and this definition of what constituted ‘Euripidean style’ became a useful tool for both artists. For Aristophanes, mocking these Euripidean elements allowed him to appropriate them into his own genre, enriching his comedy by incorporating deeper exploration of themes that had previously belonged to tragedy. For Euripides, reincorporation into his later works of the tropes that Aristophanes had singled out as being especially Euripidean helped aid in the refinement of his characteristic style or ‘brand’ (\textit{χαρακτήρ}).

In their intertextual interaction, Aristophanes and Euripides do more than simply transgress generic boundaries: they actively engage in a textual dialogue with each other. This is not to say that genre is not an extremely important part of their interaction, only that the

\textsuperscript{1} Cratinus fr. 342. The original meaning of this coinage is somewhat in dispute. Although some have argued that Aristophanes himself is the ‘Euripidaristophanizer’ in question, I follow Revermann (2006b) 102 in arguing that in its original context Cratinus is referring to someone in the audience, similar to the moment in the prologue of the \textit{Peace} when one of the slaves imagines two audience members speculating about the allegorical meaning of the dung-beetle (43-8). For more on fr. 342, see Chapter 1, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{2} In fact, paratragedy is such an integral part of Aristophanes’ comic ‘brand’ that Segal (1970) 94 writes, in a review of Rau (1967), that a division of ‘comic style’ and ‘paratragic style’ can become artificial. To Segal’s caution I would add that ‘Aristophanic style’ would also be more nearly correct than ‘comic style’, considering his greater interest in paratragedy than other comedians.
discussion should be reoriented from one of generic transgression to one of two artists conducting a dialogue with each other over the span of two decades across the swiftly shifting boundaries of two genres that were both in a state of flux. Aristophanes’ and Euripides’ awareness of each other and what makes them unique as artists also becomes a struggle with limitations – and a celebration of the strengths – of their own rapidly evolving genres.

In their intertextual dialogue, Aristophanes and Euripides explore in tandem the same themes, each in their own characteristic fashion, with every new interpretation reacting to and building on earlier ones to continually expand their repertoire of shared material. It begins in the Acharnians, with its targeted focus on Euripides’ Telephus. The Helen incorporates Aristophanes’ mockery of ragged Euripidean heroes in the Acharnians to create a hero who seems quintessentially Euripidean. The Thesmophoriazusae begins by mimicking the structure of the Euripides scene in the Acharnians before transitioning into parodies of both the Telephus and Helen, celebrating the fact that making fun of Euripides had become a signature element of Aristophanes’ style. Finally, the Bacchae appropriates from the Thesmophoriazusae many themes and motifs, including a man dressing up as a woman to spy on secret female rites. The result is a combination of comedy and tragedy, paratragedy and paracomedy, and most of all, the Aristophanic and the Euripidean, fusing the characteristic elements of the poetics of both playwrights that differentiate them from their competitors.

I. “An over-subtle, idea-chasing Euripidaristophanizer” (Cratinus fr. 342)

Most scholars would agree with M.S. Silk’s assertion that “not only do the other playwrights seem to write about tragedy less specifically and less often [than Aristophanes]: their uses of tragedy, by comparison with his, seem to be opportunist and random, where his are in
effect part of a project.”

Similarly, the consensus has changed little in the nearly thirty years since Oliver Taplin wrote, “It is now orthodox to detect comic touches in later Euripides.”

I do not seek to dispute either of these two claims. But with the phrases ‘uses of tragedy’ and ‘comic touches’, both Silk and Taplin privilege the textual interaction of each playwright with the entire other genre. Lost in this discussion is the very interesting fact that, in addition to appropriating material widely from the other’s genre, Aristophanes and Euripides also seem to have shared a specific mutual interest in each other’s work. It would therefore be an error to focus solely on each playwright’s transgression of generic boundaries without also acknowledging this interest.

It is true that Aristophanes seems to have made tragedy and tragedians a more significant part of his personal agenda than other comedians did. The existence of his coinage τρυγῳδία also shows that the negotiation of comedy’s relationship to tragedy was an important issue for him. But in addition to these more general concerns, Aristophanes also focused on Euripides to

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5 Silk (2000b) 303, with original emphases.  
4 Taplin (1986) 165.  
5 Indeed, both of these claims are now part of the general consensus, and rightly so: see Foley (2008) 18-27 on Aristophanes’ use of tragedy and pp. 28-33 on Euripides and comedy.  
6 Silk (2000b) 303; Revermann (2006a) 104-6; Foley (2008) 18. Aristophanes, Cratinus, and Eupolis all mocked tragedy at some point, as did many other comedians before and after Aristophanes, including Pherecrates, Phrynichus, and Plato Comicus; for a substantial survey, see Dover (1993) 25-8. But while Aristophanes’ primary interest was in tragedy, Cratinus’ lay in iambic (evidenced by his Archilochoi), and many comedians parodied epic; see Revermann (2013). While Aristophanes was more interested in paratragedy than other comedians, several scholars have argued that Cratinus had a similar, albeit not as extensive, parodic relationship with the works of Aeschylus to the one that Aristophanes shared with Euripides: see Silk (2000b) 304, Bakola (2010) 119-79. Nevertheless, although tragic parody is by no means unique to Aristophanes, it seems that Aristophanes used it far more than any comedian before him.  
7 Taplin (1983) 332-3 surveys the ten extant uses of this rare word (nine in Aristophanes, one in Eupolis’ Demes).
an extent that his favoritism (if it can be called that) was visible to their contemporaries. Of Aristophanes’ eleven extant comedies, only three – *Birds, Ecclesiazusae*, and *Wealth* – do not mention the tragedian by name, and he features prominently in the action of three others. Our knowledge of Aristophanes’ lost plays, such as it is, does not allow us to dismiss this bias as an accident of preservation: at least four of Aristophanes’ lost plays also contained extensive mockery of Euripides. The tragedian was a character in the *Proagôn* and *Dramas*, and Aristophanes’ *Phoenissae* and *Lemniae* were almost certainly full-length parodies of Euripides’ plays of the same name. This relentless targeting of a living poet was an unusual choice, since his major competitors mostly preferred to engage with long-dead poets such as Archilochus and Homer.

Starting from the Alexandrian period, scholars have claimed that Aristophanes hated Euripides. But it seems that his true contempt was reserved for tragedians such as Theognis who merit little more attention than a few passing insults. Aristophanes’ willingness to appropriate Euripides’ work at length and make it part of his own comic brand indicates a certain degree of

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8 Halliwell (2012) 95: “Aristophanes was exceptional, even so (and so far as we can tell), in the degree to which he found ways of making comedy directly out of tragedy. The evidence suggests that his paratragic obsession with Euripides, in particular, was not paralleled by any of his predecessors or rivals, though things may have been changing by the time a younger comic poet like Strattis came on the scene towards the end of the fifth century.”

9 These plays still contain quotations of and allusions to Euripides’ plays, but he is never specifically mentioned. Furthermore, of these three, only *Birds* predates the tragedian’s death, indicating that Aristophanes perhaps spent more energy mocking him during his lifetime.

10 Euripides’ presence in Aristophanes’ *Proagôn* and *Dramas* is attested by a scholion on *Wasps* 61c, explaining why Xanthias need to clarify that here was one play in which Aristophanes did not mock Euripides; for more on the *Wasps* and *Proagôn* as a pair, see Chapter 1, pp. 72-3.

11 Contemporary politicians, of course, were an entirely different matter, and there is evidence that Cratinus enjoyed mocking Pericles as much as Aristophanes did Cleon; see Chapter 1, p. 31, n. 22. But the rules for mocking literary figures seem to have differed, and deceased poets were the preferred targets.

12 This view was primarily popular in the nineteenth century among scholars including Nietzsche, the Schlegel brothers, and Jebb.
respect. Indeed, Aristophanes’ own poetic persona shares clear similarities with his depiction of Euripides; he regularly attributes to the tragedian the same qualities – cleverness (dexiotēs), originality (kainotēs), and artistic skill (sophia) – that he claims in his parabases set his own comedies apart from those of his competitors. His competitors noticed this convergence: a scholion on the Apology notes that “Aristophanes’ comic rivals criticized him for mocking Euripides while imitating him at the same time, and he himself admits it in the Women Claiming Tent-Sites” (Ἀριστοφάνης… ἐκωμῳδεῖτο δ’ ἐπὶ τῷ σκώπτειν μὲν Ἐυριπίδην, μιμεῖσθαι δ’ αὐτόν… καὶ αὐτὸς δ’ ἔξωμολογεῖται Σκηνὰς καταλαμβανούσαις). Although Aristophanes mocked other tragedians as well, including Aeschylus and Agathon, it is clear that Euripides occupies a special place in his oeuvre as not only a favorite target but also a playwright whom he strove to emulate, both stylistically and thematically.

Similarly, in spite of the general consensus that one can find many ‘comic touches’ in Euripides’ late plays, scholars still seem wary of the idea that Euripides might have been

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13 Foley (2008) 24 notes about the Thesmophoriazusae: “Aristophanes builds virtually an entire play on a tragic poet’s sophisticated novelties without confronting his artistic dependence on him – always a tricky problem for the comic imitator of serious genres, who implicitly acknowledges the power of the imitated text by appropriating it.”

14 Bakola (2008) 8-10; she concludes that “Euripides plays a fundamental role in Aristophanic self-presentation” (p. 10). See also Storey (1998) 125.

15 Scholion Areth. (B) on Plato Apology 19C.

16 Foley (2008) 28-32 lists a multitude of examples, from Ion sweeping the steps of Apollo’s temple to the dressing scene in the Bacchae. Zacharia (1995) is dedicated to the topic of tragedy and comedy in the Ion. For an opposing view, see Mastronarde (1999-2000) 34, who argues that tragedy had such fluid boundaries that it was impossible for Euripides to ever truly ‘transgress’ into comedy: “On this view, Euripides’ relation to the tragic genre requires careful description. He is not abandoning or corrupting a fixed genre, but exploring the potentialities of a living genre. The concern with questioning, contingency, and double vision that is so prominent in Euripides is to be accepted as properly at home in the tragic tradition. And none of this is to deny the creativity and avant-garde nature of Euripides’ work, for example in aspects like self-consciousness of rhetoric, self-consciousness of formal structure, metatheatrical or distancing gestures, the trend toward more personal and domestic themes, including eros, and the larger role for women as characters in his plays.”
influenced by Aristophanes or responded to the comic poet’s mockery in subsequent tragedies.\textsuperscript{17} Although it is widely accepted that Euripides drew material from the comic genre, scholarship on his debt to the individual comedian who dedicated a considerable amount of energy to mocking him is still relatively scarce and tentative.\textsuperscript{18} But in light of the evidence that Aristophanes’ comic criticism could sting, the probability that the two poets shared a social and intellectual circle, and the signs in Euripides’ late tragedies of self-consciousness about his place in the tragic tradition, it would almost be more surprising if Euripides had \textit{not} reacted in some manner to Aristophanes’ frequent targeting of his works.

Aristophanes’ mockery was a source of chagrin for other contemporaries; he claims that Cleon prosecuted him over derogatory comments made in the \textit{Babylonians};\textsuperscript{19} and in Plato’s \textit{Apology} Socrates suggests that Aristophanes’ depiction of him in the \textit{Clouds} had colored the public’s perception.\textsuperscript{20} Considering the evidence that \textit{komodoumenoi} in Athens did not generally

\textsuperscript{17} Wright (2006a) 37 almost goes so far as to say that when Electra refers to Helen by saying ‘\textit{ἔστι δ’ ἡ πάλαι γυνή},’ Euripides is making a ‘nod’ to Aristophanes calling the \textit{Helen} ‘\textit{ἡ καινὴ Ἑλένη}’ at \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} 850, saying, “For a tragic poet to respond implicitly to a comic poet’s criticisms would be extraordinary – though not, perhaps, without parallel.” The ‘parallel’ he cites is from satyr-play.

\textsuperscript{18} Sutton (1976), Scharffenberger (1995) and (1996), Kirkpatrick and Dunn (2002), and Mendelsohn (2009) all argue that various Euripidean plays respond to Aristophanes. On intrusions of aspects of comedy into Euripides more generally, see also Winnington-Ingram (1969), Seidensticker (1978), Knox (1979), and Foley (1980).

\textsuperscript{19} This is how, since antiquity, the references at \textit{Acharnians} 377-82, 502-3, 515-6, 576-7, and 630-1 have been taken; see Olson (2002) xxix-xxx for a fuller description. We have only Aristophanes’ word that such a lawsuit ever existed, and Rosen (1988) 63-4 in particular argues that Aristophanes invented the prosecution, while Olson admits that there is no way to prove the truth of Aristophanes’ claims. Regardless, it does not seem that Aristophanes significantly damaged Cleon’s popularity or political success. If this incident did occur, Cleon must have been angered by the insults regardless of their actual impact.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Apology} §18d, §19b-c.
consider the mockery of comedians inconsequential,\textsuperscript{21} Aristophanes’ potential influence on the Athenian audience’s perception of what characterized Euripides’ style would have been difficult for the tragedian to ignore. It is also unlikely that Euripides was unaware of Aristophanes’ mockery of his plays; the two may well have known each other and almost certainly shared acquaintances, including Socrates.\textsuperscript{22} Finally, it seems improbable that an artist as self-conscious as Euripides is usually considered to be would have had no reaction to another playwright’s habitual distortion of his persona and his tragedies. As I will explore in the first chapter, the tragedies written in the last decade of Euripides’ career contain obvious, extensive allusions to and reworkings of plays and scenes of Aeschylus, displaying a sophisticated intertextual awareness and an interest in positioning his own work in relation to the established classic. But an exploration of what constituted a Euripidean version of the Atreid myth as opposed to an Aeschylean version would most likely have had to acknowledge in some fashion Aristophanes’ role in defining what constituted Euripides’ characteristic style.

In the old model for the interaction between the two poets, Aristophanes mocked Euripides and Euripides independently incorporated elements of comedy into his late tragedies. I propose a refinement to this model whereby the two playwrights mutually drew inspiration from each other’s differing interpretations of similar themes and motifs. This interaction is similar to

\textsuperscript{21} Sommerstein (1996) 331: “The fact that virtually anyone in the public eye could expect to become a target of comic satire meant that in most cases the effect of comic satire was unlikely to be seriously damaging. Why should I worry when rude comic remarks are made about me, if they are being made about all my political rivals as well? And yet there is significant fifth- and early fourth-century evidence that some Athenians at least did regard comedy as a significant element in influencing public opinion in particular directions.” Sommerstein also argues (pp. 332–3) that vicious satire of Hyperbolus in comedy may have been a contributing factor in his ostracism.

\textsuperscript{22} In the \textit{Frogs}, Aristophanes mocks Euripides for associating too much with Socrates, while his own association with Socrates is attested by Plato’s \textit{Symposium}. Without placing too much trust in the historical accuracy of either of these attestations, it does seem likely that the two playwrights shared acquaintances.
the competitive struggle over personas that existed between rival comedians that I discuss in my first chapter: when Cratinus represented himself as an inspired poet, Aristophanes then mocked him for being an incontinent drunkard. However, far from undermining Cratinus’ self-representation, Aristophanes’ jokes provided further inspiration for the older comedian in the Pytinē, a play in which Comedy tries to divorce her alcoholic husband Cratinus but instead ends up being convinced that drunkenness is an aid rather than a hindrance to the writing of comedies. Euripides’ responses are comparatively subtler, since generic convention did not permit him to respond to Aristophanes as directly as a rival comedian could have, but the general process is similar: Aristophanes and Euripides each explored within their own genre the dramatic possibilities of some of the same themes.

My dissertation explores three themes upon which Aristophanes and Euripides responsively developed variations. The second chapter focuses on the two playwrights’ increasing manipulation of the sympathy-generating effects of ragged costumes on internal and external audiences in Aristophanes’ Acharnians and Euripides’ Telephus and Helen. In my third chapter, I argue that Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae is a comic approach to the interrogation of the contradictions inherent in the societal conception of female σοφροσύνη in Euripidean plays such as the Hippolytus; I also argue that Euripides’ Bacchae appropriates many themes and motifs from the Thesmophoriazusae and continues the intergeneric exploration and problematization of female virtue. In the fourth chapter, I show how the Thesmophoriazusae and the Bacchae both reflect on the fusing influence that the prolonged intertextual interaction had on both dramatists and the resulting simultaneous hybridity and separateness of the two authors’ styles and genres.

Each of these sequences of developing variations on a theme begins with the same motif, the mockery of an idiosyncratic element of Euripides’ style. Aristophanes repeated and expanded
upon these jokes with a dazzling display of dexterity. The same idiosyncrasy can set up a one-liner, a parodic scene, or even frame the plot of an entire comedy. I follow recent scholarship on comic rivalries in calling these recurring jokes ‘running gags’. Aristophanes used many running gags about Euripides, including: calling the tragedian’s mother a vegetable-seller in the *Acharnians, Knights, Thesmophoriazusae, and Frogs*; ascribing to him bizarre religious views in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*; and the repeated quotation three times in those same plays of a line from the *Hippolytus*, “My tongue swore, but my mind remains unsworn.” Nearly all of these jokes may be found in the *Frogs*, where Aeschylus serves as a mouthpiece to repeat all of Aristophanes’ generalizing observations about Euripides’ idiosyncrasies from the last two decades.

Some of Aristophanes’ uses of these running gags enter and exit the stage in the same breath, such as when Trygaeus’ daughter warns him not to become a Euripidean crippled beggar in the *Peace*, or when the male chorus in the *Lysistrata* agrees with Euripides that women are utterly shameless, or when the slaves in the prologue of the *Wasps* promise that this play, for once, will not mock Euripides. In the more extensive mockery of these tropes in the *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, however, Aristophanes’ own characters dress up as and imitate Euripidean characters. These parodies become explorations of what effect Euripides achieves from the use of tropes such as ragged beggar-kings or complicated female *sōphrosynē*. Claiming that Euripides was a misogynist is a running gag that allowed Aristophanes to develop in the *Thesmophoriazusae* his own variation upon the Euripidean theme of the problematic nature of

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26 *Thesmophoriazusae* 275-6, *Frogs* 102 and 1471.
female sòphrosynē.

Euripides tended to respond to Aristophanes’ variations on his themes by embracing and continuing to employ the tropes that Aristophanes had singled out as being characteristically Euripidean. However, after Aristophanes’ mockery, Euripides’ use of these tropes changes, and their generic affiliation becomes more unstable. Features of Euripidean tragedy that had previously been unambiguously tragic – such as Telephus’ beggar costume or Hippolytus’ confusion concerning whether Phaedra’s mind can be considered sòphròn if her actions are not – take on elements of comedy. Menelaus dressed in a sail should be more ragged and pathetic even than Telephus, but he seems instead to have the metatheatrical self-awareness of Aristophanes’ Dicaeopolis playing the role of Telephus. When Pentheus worries about the sòphrosynē of the Bacchants on Cithaeron, he seems to be accusing them not simply of bad behavior, but specifically of acting like women in a comedy by getting drunk and sneaking away from a religious gathering to engage in illicit sexual encounters. And when Pentheus dresses up in a female costume, he becomes an object of mocking laughter, and the god seems to stage a ‘comedy’ for himself and the chorus within the frame of a tragedy. Euripides’ reuse of these tropes after Aristophanes’ mockery incorporates elements of both genres.

II. “May I rightly refute whatever words I grasp hold of” (Frogs 894)

Previous studies of Aristophanes and Euripides are plagued by a number of problems of terminology. When studying Aristophanes’ appropriation and manipulation of Euripides’ tragedies, the main terminological difficulty concerns the terms ‘parody’ and ‘paratragedy’. The

27 Parker (1997) 6 notes that “Writers on Aristophanes commonly use ‘parody’ in a loose sense to cover all sorts of pastiche and allusion.”
confusion between these terms dates back even to the scholiasts on Aristophanes. Silk’s definition would have tragic parody be a subset of paratragedy: “paratragedy is the cover term for all of comedy’s intertextual dependence on tragedy, some of which is parodic, but some is not; and that parody is any kind of distorting representation of an original, which in the present context will be a tragic original.” Silk’s definition of paratragedy is, I believe, too broad to be useful to my argument, as it combines two very different kinds of appropriation: on the one hand, appropriation of the conventions of the tragic genre, and on the other hand, appropriation, reference to, and manipulation of specific tragic texts. Dicaeopolis’ imitation of Telephus in the Acharnians is very different from the Agathonian lyric pastiche in the first scene of the Thesmophoriazusae, and neither is similar to a one-liner joke in the Lysistrata referring to Euripides’ supposed hatred of women. Defining paratragedy so broadly as to encompass all three dilutes its usefulness as a term.

Instead, I use ‘paratragedy’ to refer to the use in Old Comedy of noticeably tragic style, vocabulary, and meter, especially in a way that contrasts sharply with more traditional comic style, vocabulary, and meter to create a sudden shift in tone. In this I follow Martin Revermann, who defines paratragedy as “a somewhat organic and evolving theatrical process, the prime objective of which is to create an ‘atmosphere’, ‘environment’ or ‘mood’ reminiscent of tragedy,

28 Lelièvre (1954) 70-1 points out that a scholiast on Acharnians defines paratragedy as ‘parody’.
29 Silk (1993) 479, with original emphases. Silk follows Rau (1967) but claims that the latter can be “promiscuous” with the terminology (pp. 478-9).
30 Most scholars of humor recognize a few main competing theories for understanding how humor works, summarized in Farber (2007) 67: relief theory, where humor works to release tension; superiority theory, where humor results from joy at the misfortunes of others; and incongruity theory, where humor results from the realization of the fundamental mismatch between an object and its context. See Chapter 2, p. 95 and nn. 38-41. My definition of paratragedy places it in the last category; paratragedy is amusing because of the incongruous contrast between tragic language and comic setting.
and which rests on levels of familiarity with tragic plots, plot-patterns or even little plot-pieces.”

In my taxonomy, not all appropriation of a tragedy would necessarily be paratragic; paratragedy occurs only when the comedian shifts, somewhat incongruously, into a tragic tone. Paratragedy does not require a specific target tragedy, since it adopts the hallmarks of the genre rather than any one text. Paratragedy is extremely rare within tragedy itself, since the style, vocabulary, and meter of the text is already tragic and therefore appropriation creates no tonal contrast. The only possibility for paratragedy within tragedy is in a rare circumstance such as Euripides’ Helen, where, as I argue in Chapter 2, Menelaus is similar enough to Dicaeopolis in Aristophanes’ Acharnians that he feels like a comic character incongruously transported into a tragic setting. When he uses high tragic diction to address the plain-speaking gatekeeper of Theoclymenus’ palace, the tonal contrast creates an atmosphere of paratragedy.

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31 Revermann (2006b) 103. Revermann also best describes how paratragedy works: “This is a theatrically rich and complex phenomenon which operates not just on the plain linguistic level of the spoken word, but also involves paralinguistic and visual signs (rhythm, gesture, costume, as well as, it would seem, pitch and intonation). In addition, instances of paratragedy may involve music, which introduces new layers on top of an already complex set of parameters: melody, rhythm (again), colour of tone, pitch (again, including falsetto), phrasing, volume, even another agent and generator of signs, the aulos-player (who on occasion may have been integrated into the action).” Another good definition is that of Foley (2008) 21, n. 24, following Pucci (1961): paratragedy is “the comic appropriation of plots, stage devices, and lines with noticeably tragic diction” while parody is “caricature of tragic lines and style.”

32 Quotation of tragedy within comedy would by my definition always be paratragic, provided that the diction of the tragic quotation is not colloquial. However, an audience member who fails to recognize a quotation might assume that Aristophanes is simply imitating tragic diction, as he so often does, instead of borrowing from a specific text. Goldhill (1990) 209 seems to suggest this when he writes about the Acharnians, “Whether Dicaeopolis is seen merely to be acting in a tragic way for comic effect or constructing an elaborate and significant network of allusions with Euripides’ Telephus necessarily depends on the knowledge and attitudes with which an audience member approaches the Acharnians.”

33 Discussed further at Chapter 2, pp. 119-20.
Parody is also a term that has been given many conflicting definitions.\textsuperscript{34} For the purposes of this dissertation, ‘parody’ is defined as the distorting transformation of a target text into a new text so as to call attention to the divergence between the two.\textsuperscript{35} Although this distortion and the resulting divergence may, and in the case of Old Comedy frequently does become a source of humor, it does not necessarily involve ridicule of the target text, although many theorists’ definitions do include this pejorative element: Margaret Rose argues that, absent a connotation of ridicule, the use of ‘parody’ as a term does not serve “a useful, distinct purpose.”\textsuperscript{36} However, especially when analyzing ancient texts, humor is difficult enough to access, let alone prove. Furthermore, the power dynamic between a parody and a parodied text is far too complex to reduce to mere mockery; as Linda Hutcheon points out, “Parody always implicitly reinforces even as it ironically debunks.”\textsuperscript{37} Any parody, but especially repeated parody of works by the same

\textsuperscript{34} There are so many, in fact, that some scholars such as Gérard Genette have proposed new terms that would allow scholars to opt out of the confusion: Genette (1982) 8 prefers the word ‘hypertextuality’ to refer to relationships of dependency between texts. Genette categorizes (p. 6) Vergil’s \textit{Aeneid} and Joyce’s \textit{Ulysses} as two separate hypertexts of the same hypotext, the \textit{Odyssey}. Although his strategy is a viable workaround, I will primarily use more traditional terminology.

\textsuperscript{35} My definition is most similar to that of Hutcheon (1985) 6, who defines parody as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity.” My definition differs in the following ways: my pragmatics are somewhat simpler, since she puts a great deal of effort into problematizing the ‘target’ idea, pointing out that sometimes the target is not the subsumed text. Additionally, she uses the term ‘difference’, while I use the term ‘divergence’. The reason I have chosen to make this alteration is that, in information-theoretical terms, the ‘difference’ between two objects A and B is always the same, but A might diverge more from B than B does from A. This distinction seems to me to be especially valuable when discussing comedy and tragedy. The differences between my definition and hers are likely inevitable, since, as she points out (p. 10) “there are probably no transhistorical definitions possible.”

\textsuperscript{36} Rose (1979) 20. This confusion is inherent to the etymology of the word παρῳδία, since the prefix παρ- can have different connotations: it can signify a song that is meant to counter another song, or one that is meant to sit alongside it. See also Lelièvre (1954) 66. According to Householder (1944) 2-4, the ancient Greek definition of parody seems to have been as its own unique genre, a mock-epic poem in dactylic hexameter that made light of Homeric topics. Householder’s definition is derived primarily from a brief mention in Aristotle \textit{Poetics} 1448a 12-13 of Hegemon of Thasos, the first parodist, and a few quotations of Athenaeus. My definition is closer to what Householder identifies as the Roman-era ‘rhetorical’ definition of an \textit{imitatio sermonum}.

\textsuperscript{37} Hutcheon (1985) xii. Goldhill (1990) 210-1 also argues for an “ambivalent relationship between parodist and object of parody”.

individual, creates an extremely complex dynamic between the two artists: the parodying text draws on and enhances the power of the target text while also engaging in distortion and possibly even criticism. The appropriating text claims superiority over its target while simultaneously legitimizing its target’s worth and connecting both texts – and the authors of those texts – in the minds of the audience. This phenomenon is certainly apparent in the relationship between Aristophanes and Euripides. The meaning of ευριπιδαριστοφανίζων is controversial, but it seems that Cratinus was suggesting that the styles of the two playwrights were converging, even in spite of the fact that they were working within different genres.\textsuperscript{38} By making Euripides a frequent target, Aristophanes associated himself with the tragedian so closely that other comedians targeted the association itself. By the time Cratinus used the word ευριπιδαριστοφανίζων, the convergence between the poetics of the two artists was itself becoming something of a punchline.\textsuperscript{39}

Parody is related to but distinct from paratragedy; in my definition the two are overlapping sets, unlike Silk’s definition, in which parody is a subset of paratragedy. Although tragic parody often utilizes paratragedy, especially in the form of tragic language, it is not a requirement. The Scythian Archer in the Thesmophoriazusae, for instance, is a parody of the barbarian blocking figure in Euripides’ escape-tragedies, but uses no tragic vocabulary or tone. My definition creates a distinction between parody and travesty, which is meant to ridicule a

\textsuperscript{38} Although for a caution on this interpretation cf. Rosen (2013) 82, n. 3: “Cratin. fr. 342... offers a rare moment of self-consciousness about how the two dramatic genres might ‘fuse’. But without real context, it is impossible to know what it all amounts to: it might well imply that Cratinus thought of Aristophanic comedy as deeply informed by Euripidean tragedy; or it may only suggest that Aristophanes is capable of posing as an intellectual like Euripides but was not necessarily derivative of him.”

\textsuperscript{39} This fact alone suggests that several more Aristophanic parodies of Euripides’ works may have been lost, since Cratinus seems to have no longer been active after about 421 and therefore two of the extant plays in which Aristophanes parodied Euripides most prominently – the Thesmophoriazusae and the Frogs – certainly postdate Cratinus’ coinage of the word.
target text.\textsuperscript{40} It also separates parody from pastiche, in which a target text is extensively imitated in a new text without satirical intent. Gérard Genette draws a useful distinction between imitative and transformational appropriation on the one hand, and satirical and non-satirical appropriation on the other. His terms thus form a grid: parody is non-satirical transformation, travesty is satirical transformation, pastiche is non-satirical imitation, and caricature is satirical imitation.\textsuperscript{41} Using this terminology, the recognition scene in the \textit{Electra} is a parody and not a pastiche of the \textit{Oresteia}, because Euripides’ Electra rejects the signs used in Aeschylus’ play to reveal Orestes’ identity. The difference between the two tragedies is highlighted by their different approach to the \textit{topos}. Parody and pastiche can coexist in the same text; as I will show in Chapter 4, Aristophanes’ appropriation in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} of Euripides’ \textit{Telephus}, \textit{Helen}, and \textit{Andromeda} contains both. The parody occurs when Mnesilochus acts out scenes from the tragedies,\textsuperscript{42} but the entire structure of the comedy is a pastiche of recent Euripidean escape-tragedies, borrowing elements from the \textit{Helen} and \textit{Andromeda} so that by the end of the play it bears a striking similarity to Euripides’ plays.\textsuperscript{43}

When a parody stresses its divergence from the target text, it creates the possibility of

\textsuperscript{40} On the difference between both travesty and burlesque on the one hand and parody on the other, I follow Householder (1944) 1-2.
\textsuperscript{41} Genette (1982) 27, followed by Hutcheon (1985) 38-40, who claims that “parody is transformational in its relationship to other texts” while, in contrast, “pastiche is imitative”. Both, however, are acknowledged forms of imitation, differentiating them from plagiarism, in which the connection between the texts is intentionally concealed.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{contra} Silk (1993) 494-5 and Foley (2008) 24, who argues that in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} “there is in fact little parodic mockery of Euripides’ plays” and claims that the only true parody in the play is that of Agathon’s lyrics in the prologue. The difference with my claim here depends more on different definitions of the term ‘parody’ than on conflicting analyses of the play.
\textsuperscript{43} The term ‘escape-tragedy’ originates in Wright (2005). As with all terminology, it is not without flaws: Silk (2013) 24-26 criticizes the term’s inaccuracy and anachronism, pointing out that it is no more authentic than terms such as ‘tragocomedy’ and ‘romance’ that Wright dismisses. However, I find ‘escape-tragedy’ a useful term for describing the unique characteristics of Euripides’ \textit{IT}, \textit{Helen}, and \textit{Andromeda}, so I will continue to use it nevertheless.
criticizing the target by explicitly changing the target’s weaknesses into a new form. F. J. Lelièvre calls this technique ‘critical parody’:

This type can be said to reveal by a few adroit changes – verbal or in context or both – how near to the ludicrous are the stylistic idiosyncrasies of an author and the ideas which he (with his devotees) takes seriously. In detecting and distorting these favourite turns parody acts as a form of criticism using the medium of humour.  

Although my definition of parody does not include humor as a necessary component, as Lelièvre’s does, the concept of critical parody is a valuable one for illuminating how Aristophanes uses parody to emphasize the characteristic tendencies of Euripides’ tragedies. The creation of an individual style is exactly what makes parody possible; as William van O’Connor notes, “It is quite true that a man who has not developed a clearly individual style cannot be parodied. He must have a subject inherently interesting and a manner that is idiosyncratic.” But as Rose points out, parody is also vulnerable in that it has an inherent self-reflexivity; the act of parodying another text draws attention to the fact that one’s own work can in turn become a

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44 Lelièvre (1954) 74. Lelièvre is quick to point out that although we find critical parody the most attractive, it is not the only or even most popular kind in antiquity. However, for Lelièvre it is the telos of parody (p. 81): “With Aristophanes there develops the most advanced function of parody, that of selecting and illuminating the special characteristics of the author whose material is employed.”

45 Lelièvre (1954) 72 argues that “the position as regards παρῳδή and cognate words appears to be as follows: their basic notion is a neutral one – ’singing after the style of an original but with a difference’. It is probable, however, that as long as these words have existed they have been used in connexion with the humorous treatment of the original and it is fair to suppose that this act tends to colour them.” However, he later notes (p. 72) that not all ancient usages are used to describe humorous ways of treating a text, so my use of a definition similar to his ‘basic notion’ seems reasonable.

46 van O’Connor (1964) 203.
target for someone else.\footnote{This self-reflexivity is an especially important component of parody for Rose; see Rose (1979) 97: “the problems of self-reference in metafiction... have shown metafictional parody to imply criticism of itself, and a form of ‘self-parody’ in parodying other fictions.” See also Hannoosh (1989) 114: “A parody must even allow for a critique of itself such as it has performed on the original (or target, when these are different). This distinguishes parodic renewals from more generally intertextual ones, which are not obliged to make critical demands upon themselves in this way; the comic element present in parody, on the other hand, renders such self-criticism virtually compulsory... the parody actually rebounds upon itself, calling itself into question as it does the parodied work, and suggesting its own potential as a model or target, a work to be rewritten, transformed, even parodied in its turn.”} This self-reflexivity, when combined with critical parody, allows for the creation of a dialogue in which two or more authors reciprocally parody each other’s texts by pointing out each other’s stylistic quirks, as Aristophanes, Cratinus, and Eupolis tend to do. The dialogue between Aristophanes and Euripides takes a similar, but slightly different form: instead of responsively parodying Aristophanes’ works, Euripides’ later plays seem to use Aristophanes’ identification of his own idiosyncratic tendencies to aid in the increasing definition and refinement of a characteristic Euripidean style.

Scholarship concerning the influence of comedy on Euripides also utilizes several different overlapping and often imprecisely defined terms, including ‘comedy’, ‘comic’, and ‘paracomedy’. The last of these is a term that has only relatively recently begun to find wide usage, but it too is used confusingly by different scholars to denote different kinds of textual interaction; it may either broadly refer to any influence of comedy on Euripides, or to Euripides specifically borrowing and adapting material from Aristophanes.\footnote{Scharffenberg (1996) uses the latter definition, while Kirkpatrick and Dunn (2002) use the former.} Keith Sidwell also uses the term ‘ventriloquial paracomedy’ to refer to a practice by which comedians write plays as though in the persona of their competitors.\footnote{Sidwell (1995) 65-9; for example, he argues that the Acharnians presents itself as though it were written by Eupolis. Sidwell’s theory has not been widely accepted, although it may be seen as the precursor of more recent studies about battles between comedians over control of each other’s personas.} In my taxonomy, paracomedy is the opposite of
paratragedy, the use of noticeably comic diction or style in a non-comic setting.\textsuperscript{30}

Much of what is sometimes called paracomedy in Euripides has in the past simply been called ‘comic’ or ‘comedy’, both problematic terms. The drastic evolution of comedy in the last two and a half millennia has created a certain amount of flexibility in the term ‘comic’; it is used as often to mean ‘funny’ or ‘amusing’ as it is to mean ‘belonging to the genre of comedy’.\textsuperscript{51} Even if scholars only used the word in the second, more rigorous sense, one would still have to account for the fact that comedy as a genre has changed a great deal, and the same generic features are not all present in the comedies of Aristophanes, the comedies of Shakespeare, and the acts of contemporary stand-up comedians. When scholars call part of a Euripidean tragedy comic, they rarely discriminate between these closely connected but discrete definitions of the word: they might mean that it is amusing, or that it seems more appropriate to New Comedy (or, less frequently, Old Comedy) than tragedy.\textsuperscript{52}

Some scholars have noticed and even attempted to ameliorate this terminological difficulty. When Charles Segal notes, “Unquestionably there is much in the Helen that is comic, or at least amusing”,\textsuperscript{53} he acknowledges this potential confusion. More helpfully, in his study of comic elements (\textit{komische Elemente}) in Greek tragedy, Bernd Seidensticker draws a useful distinction

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Taplin (1986) 171 notes that “(it would, by the way, be easy for tragedy to parody comedy, if that were desirable)”, since comic tone would be jarring within the context of tragedy.
\item \textsuperscript{51} OED, s.v. comic; the first two definitions of the word are “of, proper, or belonging to comedy, in the dramatic sense, as distinguished from tragedy” and “Aiming at a humorous or ridiculous effect”.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Knox (1979) 250 argues that “One cannot help suspecting that what everyone would really like to call these plays (at least the Ion) is comedy (though no one, to my knowledge, has taken the plunge)... provided the word ‘comedy’ is understood in modern, not ancient terms, Euripides... is the inventor, for the stage, of what we know as comedy.” However, Knox notes (p. 251) that Euripides himself would not have considered what he was writing ‘comedy’ at all.
\item \textsuperscript{53} C. Segal (1971) 612.
\end{itemize}
with ‘comedy elements’ (Komòdinelemente). According to Seidensticker, the latter are easier to determine because they do not rely on an assessment of tone:

Euripides makes extensive use of structural forms, characters, dramatic situations, motifs, themes, and story patterns which were already or were soon to become typical elements of comedy. These I shall call comedy elements. Comic elements, on the other hand, – and the adjective comic – will be used as a general term for the 'laughable' (τὸ γελοῖον) in its various manifestations and tones. It is thus obvious that a comedy element in the context of a tragedy is not necessarily comic... Although the identification and evaluation of comedy elements in Greek tragedy is not without difficulty, scholars in this instance tend to agree much more readily than they do in the matter of the comic tone of a line or scene. This discrepancy is understandable. For it is indeed easier by use of parallels from comedy to show that a certain motif or dramatic situation is 'borrowed' from the sister genre, than to prove that the author aims at laughter or at least an amused smile.

More recently, Barbara Goff, in a study of the play of genres in the Electra, uses both the words ‘comic’ and ‘comedic’, although without clearly differentiating whether the former means ‘amusing’ and the latter refers to the genre of comedy. If intentional, this distinction is a valuable one, although the potentially useful neologism ‘comedic’ has not entered the scholarly vernacular. Despite these few examples of terminological rigor, there is unfortunately still a great deal of inexactitude and confusion.

Since my focus is on Aristophanes and Euripides, I will use the word ‘comic’ exclusively

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55 Seidensticker (1978) 305-6 with original emphases, from which Seidensticker (1982) 44-5 seems to be a more or less verbatim translation. He also notes the potential for anachronism that the evolution of comedy creates (p. 306): “A further distinction can be made between comedy elements which Euripides demonstrably adapted – or may have adapted – from contemporary old comedy and those, which form part of the postclassical, Hellenistic-Roman, and the modern European comedy tradition. Only the former could of course be recognized as such by Euripides’ audience and so become an integral part of their conscious aesthetic experience... ”
in its generic sense, to mean that something seems characteristic of Old Comedy (and not, unless specified, New Comedy). When I refer to an element of one of Euripides’ tragedies as ‘comic’, I mean that Euripides has borrowed it, either unconsciously or consciously, from Old Comedy. Absent should be any connotation of humor, for, as Seidensticker points out, when imported into tragedy something comic need not be amusing. Furthermore, the question of whether or not humor (and its result, laughter) is even permissible in Attic tragedy is hotly contested. Some think that laughter has no place in tragedy at all. Matthew Dillon argues persuasively that when the word γελοῖος is used by scholiasts to describe a line in tragedy, they mean not that the line was funny but that it seems incongruous or strange. But Seidensticker usefully introduces a comparison with the porter scene in Shakespeare’s Macbeth to argue that even if a particular scene is amusing, laughter can heighten the sense of tragedy by contrast. In this debate over whether there is no laughter or laughter exists but serves to highlight the seriousness of the rest of the play, the implicit (and not entirely incorrect) assumption is that laughter cannot exist for its own sake in a tragedy without turning the tragedy into a comedy.

But it is crucially important not to confuse questions of genre with questions of tone. Few would argue that even the most ‘tragic’ tragedies have a single, uniform tone; the Agamemnon, which has to my knowledge never been called a comedy, encompasses nationalistic triumph,

57 The definitive study on Greek laughter is Halliwell (2008), which avoids the topic of laughter in tragedy and instead focuses on other genres. In an earlier study, Halliwell (1991) draws a distinction between ‘playful laughter’ and ‘consequential laughter’. His definition of the latter is particularly resonant in tragedy (p. 282): “Laughter is judged or experienced to be consequential whenever it is perceived as impinging upon or likely to influence the processes of personal and social relations beyond the immediate context.” Pentheus’ fear in the Bacchae of seeming laughable certainly follows the model of ‘consequential laughter’.

58 See, for example, the scathing indictment of Taplin (1986) 173: “Those who enjoy seeing jokes in Greek tragedy seldom have much sense of theatre beyond the text.”


foreboding, angry debate, and grief, along with many other emotions. Old Comedy similarly allows for a broad range of tones, some serious and some absurd. Therefore, even if one could prove conclusively that an element of one of Euripides’ tragedies was intended to be amusing, it would not necessarily mean that motif was more characteristic of comedy than tragedy. The opposite holds true as well: seriousness is not proof of a lack of Aristophanic influence.

All of these terms – comic, paracomedy, paratragedy, and parody – are useful to varying degrees in describing the intertextual interaction between Aristophanes and Euripides. But the terms used most frequently by scholars to discuss the appropriation of texts by Aristophanes and Euripides from the other genre – ‘paratragedy’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘paracomedy’ – are both too generically focused to fully encompass the scope of the intertextual relationship between Aristophanes and Euripides, and are particularly inadequate in describing intergeneric interactions where no tonal contrast is evident. ‘Parody’ is more flexible and better suited to describing the transformation of a specific text to fit a new context, such as the scenes from Euripidean tragedy acted out in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, but it too is insufficient to describe the large-scale borrowing of and expansion on thematic material from another poet. This type of appropriation I will call a ‘variation on a theme’, a concept borrowed from music theory. Using this terminology, Euripides’ *Telephus, Electra*, and *Helen* and Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* are all

61 Mastronarde (1999-2000) 27-9; see also Griffith (2008) 61-2, with original emphases: “the proper audience response to theater was (is) not necessarily supposed to be EITHER ‘pity and fear’ (for high, serious tragedy) OR ‘laughter and mockery’ (for low, gross comedy, or burlesque). Other responses and feelings may be legitimate too, such as local or patriotic pride, wonder, comfort, erotic desire, religious awe, and joy – to say nothing of pleasantly and confusingly ‘mixed feelings’ too.”

62 Woolf (1967) 12, in her essay “On Not Knowing Greek,” points out the difficulty of knowing what the Greeks would have found amusing, which can lead to an uncertainty about when laughter is appropriate. An additional complication is the fact that authorial intent is not always matched by audience reception; Silk (2013) 26 adds the example of Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, a play which Chekhov intended to be a comedy but at its first reading provoked tears in his audience.
variations on the theme of using a ragged costume to generate sympathy. However, since the idea of ‘variations’ lays the emphasis on each text’s connection to the central theme rather than the texts’ influence and dependence on each other, I will often use the term ‘developing variation’, coined by Schoenberg to describe how Brahms augmented and intensified musical themes through successive repetitions.\textsuperscript{63} The responsive development by Aristophanes and Euripides of variations on the same themes allowed both poets to refine their characteristic brands.

One could claim, perhaps, that Aristophanes’ mockery of Euripides is not ‘serious’ literary criticism, and that his appropriation of tragedy is merely meant to provoke laughter rather than explore serious tragic themes.\textsuperscript{64} Perhaps Euripides was also indifferent to Aristophanes’ mockery of his tragedies,\textsuperscript{65} and his style developed and became more distinctive naturally over time through his self-conscious exploration of what characterized his works, independent of any comic influence. But these interpretations seem to me both unsatisfying and unlikely. Instead, I argue that Aristophanes and Euripides engaged deeply with each other’s texts in a dialogue that inspired and enriched the work of both playwrights.

\textsuperscript{63} Frisch (1982) and (1984).
\textsuperscript{64} Although see Silk (2002) 301-49 on the ‘seriousness’ of Aristophanic comedy and especially pp. 304-9 on the problematic way in which seriousness is usually defined by scholars; Silk argues that laughter and seriousness are not necessarily mutually exclusive.
\textsuperscript{65} Taplin (1993) 63 argues that “Tragedy would not, of course, acknowledge the rivalry of comedy – it is ‘beneath notice’.” But although a tragic text might not openly ‘acknowledge’ a comic text, it does not necessarily follow that there must also be no implicit response.
CHAPTER 1
PARODY IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY: TRAGIC AND COMIC INTERTEXTUALITY

The dramatic dialogue between Aristophanes and Euripides is unique: although Athenian playwrights frequently appropriated material from their rivals and predecessors within their own genre, there is no other recorded instance of reciprocal textual dialogue between two poets of different genres. This nexus of tragedy and comedy is a defining feature of the two playwrights’ relationship: their dialogue not only exists over generic boundaries but also sometimes becomes an exploration of that differential space between tragedy and comedy, interrogating how the formal conventions of the two genres allowed for different variations on the same thematic material. Throughout a twenty-year period, Aristophanes and Euripides adapted textual appropriation strategies from tragedy and comedy to use against one another in a dramatic dialogue for which the difference in genres was both a constraint and a benefit. The complexity and difficulty of spanning the generic boundary between tragedy and comedy is part of what makes the interaction between these two playwrights so extraordinary.

The unique nature of this intergeneric dialogue makes it fascinating, but also creates a challenge for the scholar searching for terms to describe an unprecedented relationship. Fortunately, there already exist parallel interactions that can serve as a model for analyzing the one between Euripides and Aristophanes. Within the genre of Old Comedy, dialogue between rival playwrights was commonplace; Aristophanes, Cratinus, and Eupolis engaged in constant manipulation of each other’s works. Comedians routinely appropriated, twisted, and mocked each other’s plays and poetic self-representations. Aristophanes and Cratinus, in particular, traded barbs and manipulated each others’ texts in a similar manner to Aristophanes and
Euripides. But the dialogue between Aristophanes and Cratinus has the advantage of being well-studied and well-attested, so that a good understanding of the comic relationship can inform our understanding of the less well-understood tragicomic relationship.¹

The similarities between Aristophanes’ dialogue with Cratinus and his dialogue with Euripides are instructive, but there are necessarily substantial differences in both intertextual technique and authorial power dynamics caused by the fact that Euripides was participating in the dialogue from within the confines of a different genre. Compared to Aristophanes, Euripides had relatively fewer tools at his disposal to respond to another poet: tragedy has no *parabasis* and rarely mentions living people by name. In fact, the major tools available to Euripides for responding to Aristophanes were the same ones he used to allude to earlier tragedies such as the works of Aeschylus.

In this chapter, I will describe in detail the textual interplay between Aristophanes and Cratinus on the one hand and Euripides and Aeschylus on the other. In these relationships, many different kinds and degrees of textual appropriation are used. Sometimes the appropriation is blatant, as in Aristophanes’ insults of Cratinus in the *Wasps* or Euripides’ treatment of the *Oresteia* in his *Orestes*. Other forms of textual appropriation are less obvious, such as the use of another playwright’s phrases or characteristic imagery. Subtler still is the transmutation of entire plots, such as the *Wasps’* adaptation of the plot of the *Pytinė*.² Focusing on how Aristophanes and Euripides interacted with other playwrights within their own respective genres allows for a greater degree of attention to the mechanics of textual appropriation without the attendant

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¹ For my purposes, ‘tragicomic’ means ‘involving both tragedy and comedy’, with no reference to the plays of Euripides called ‘tragicomedies’ as defined by Barnes (1964) 127.

² All of these categories are examined in detail by Schlesinger (1936) and (1937) and Rau (1967), and an excellent study is Lelièvre (1954) 66–9. Bakhtin (1981) 68–9 notes the “varying degrees of assimilation” in quotations, that they may be “hidden, overt, half-hidden”.

problems of intergeneric communication.

In order to help inform our understanding of the unique dialogue between Aristophanes and Euripides, I will explore in depth two different kinds of textual appropriation in fifth-century drama: struggles over persona between comedians and Euripides’ manipulation of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* in his *Electra* and *Orestes*. These two different modes of intrageneric appropriation can illuminate our understanding of the relationship between Aristophanes and Euripides in different ways. The interactions between comedians show how playwrights could shape each other’s idiosyncrasies and tendencies into a literary persona, blurring the lines between criticism of a dramatist and criticism of his dramas. Euripides’ parodies of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* show one way of actively engaging with literary predecessors in order to both embrace and reject their influence on one’s own works. Altered versions of these strategies would become integral to the dramatic dialogue between Aristophanes and Euripides. But because they were not rivals in the same genre, their intertextual relationship had the advantage of being mutually beneficial rather than competitive.

I. “Wearing a dried-up wreath, he’s dying of thirst” (*Knights 534*)

Old Comedy appears to be far more transparent than tragedy about the power dynamics between competing poets. In fact, the authorial voice in many of Aristophanes’ parabases often declares his superiority to all other comedians, including not only living competitors but also his dead and retired predecessors. Aristophanes’ construction of himself as the telos of comedy is seductive, and in the absence of any obvious evidence to the contrary, it is dangerously easy to

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5 Redfield (1990) 314-6 gathers the different passages in Aristophanes’ works that make this claim, most of them in parabases.
take his claims at face value. Furthermore, an ‘Aristophanocentric’ viewpoint is a natural one to adopt because Aristophanes and his eleven remaining comedies will always be easier and more fruitful objects of study than what little remains of any other comedian’s work. Imagine how different fifth-century tragedy would seem if only plays by Sophocles were still extant; Aristotle’s *Poetics* already suggests that his works were closest to the *telos* of tragedy, but the survival of the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides has made our understanding of the genre far more complex.

The transparency of comic power dynamics turns out to be an illusion for several reasons. Merely by appropriating his rivals’ texts and incorporating them into his own, Aristophanes undermines his own claim of superiority by implicitly acknowledging his competitors’ worth. Furthermore, one might wonder if Aristophanes would have needed to be quite so vocal about his superiority if it were uncontested, and the victory records show that his two main competitors, Cratinus and Eupolis, both won many comic contests as well. But the most complicated question to answer is one of the most basic: who, exactly, is the person(a) claiming...

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4 Consider, for instance, Sommerstein (2002b) referring to all of Aristophanes’ contemporaries as ‘Minor Comedians’, which is an accurate assessment only if the metric is how much material has survived, or Silk (2000a) 6: “It seems clear that Aristophanes was consistently an innovator, so that ‘generic’ might often only mean a feature popularised by Aristophanes himself.”

5 Jones (1962) 160 claims that “It is... undeniable that Aristotle was holding Sophocles before him as his model when he wrote the *Poetics*”, but cf. Halliwell (1986) 94.

6 See Dover (2000) for a very insightful look into an alternate universe in which we knew only as much about Aristophanes’ *Frogs* as we do now about Eupolis’ *Nanny-Goats*.


8 The last decade has seen a renaissance in the study of these two comedians. Both have been the subject of recent monographs and many of their fragments have been newly edited. On Eupolis, see the recent monograph by Storey (2003a) and the edition of Eupolis’ *Demes* by Telò (2007). The recent monograph on Cratinus is Bakola (2010). Olson (2007) provides detailed commentary on a limited number of fragments, while Rusten (2011) collects, edits, and translates nearly every comic fragment of note. Also worthy of mention here is Harvey and Wilkins (2000), a volume that derives from a conference on the rivals of Aristophanes. The study of their fragments is no longer seen primarily as a way to better understand Aristophanes, the real object of interest.
to be the best comedian here? To what extent can Aristophanes be unproblematically equated with the first-person voice in his own comedies?

This question has been heavily debated, and the current consensus is that the speaker is not Aristophanes himself but a carefully constructed Aristophanic persona. Emmanuela Bakola defines the comic persona in these terms:

Poetic self-presentation involves the construction and projection of an identity and a character in the course of a poem or an oeuvre. This is usually termed 'persona'. Construction of a persona involves a varying degree of 'fictionalisation' of an author’s character, and the degree of correspondence between fiction and reality may consequently fluctuate. Not only may aspects of the persona correspond to or diverge from the historical author’s identity and character to a greater or lesser degree, but also, across a poet’s oeuvre and from poem to poem, the constructed persona can either be relatively consistent or shift according to the needs of a particular performance.\(^9\)

The construction of a persona – a fictional self that stands in for the actual comedian – has a number of purposes. As a replacement for the playwright, the persona creates the illusion of intimacy between author and audience; no matter what the playwright’s opinions or feelings are, the persona can speak directly to the audience members from a sympathetic viewpoint. The most consistent aspect of the persona is its connection to the poet’s body of work. In Old Comedy, the persona tended to become a crystallization of the poet’s style, characteristic tendencies, and signature elements of his work, what I have termed a 'brand'.\(^{10}\)

It is easy to see how the construction of a persona would benefit a comedian, but once a persona was established, it was also fair game for other poets to manipulate and mock to their

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\(^9\) Bakola (2008) 1, n. 4.

\(^{10}\) Another term frequently used for the collection of unique tendencies that characterize a poet’s work is ‘poetics’. 
own ends. Bakola argues that Aristophanes represented himself as a healer of the city, Cratinus represented himself as an inspired poet, and Eupolis represented himself as a teacher. But in the hands of their competitors, Aristophanes became a quack, Cratinus a drunk, and Eupolis a pedophile. The comedians then had the challenge of retaking control over their respective personas. This “intertextual biography” has been the subject of a number of articles in recent years. Maintaining control over one’s own persona was a difficult task for a comedian, one that required vigilance and effort. With only a few well-chosen words, a competitor could easily corrupt a persona and make it appear ridiculous; reconstruction required far more energy, to the extent that both Cratinus and Eupolis devoted entire plays to the task of reshaping their personas back into their desired forms. It is unclear whether losing control over one’s persona truly had an impact on the competition, but it seems to have been a point of pride nevertheless. The persona constituted, for comedians, a manifestation of what made their plays exceptional.

The persona becomes an intermediary figure that allows some abstraction and simplification of the power dynamic between competitors: Aristophanes’ persona can openly criticize other comedians as being drunks or pederasts, while the other subtler forms of textual appropriation are more difficult to discern. Bakola (2008) is the only study of this phenomenon as concerns Aristophanes’ reformer persona (see pp. 4-6, where she also analyzes the Solonian elements of this persona) and Eupolis’ teacher persona (pp. 20-6), although Cratinus’ drunk persona is well-understood. For the elements of his self-representation involving natural imagery like flowing rivers, see also Rosen (2000) 30-1. Bakola (2008) 14-5 puts it very nicely: “These images (as well as the poet’s self-association with Dionysus more generally) suggest that at the heart of Cratinus’ self-constructed poetic image was a nexus of complementary and interrelated ideas and metaphors which placed the emphasis on spontaneity, fluency, artistic fertility, natural genius. This, as we will see below, appears especially striking in comparison with the more ‘intellectual’ and ‘technical’ kind of poetics with which Cratinus associates Aristophanes and Aristophanes to some degree associates himself.”

interaction give a more complicated picture of influence, indebtedness, and respect for his rivals. This caution is especially important when applied to the similar relationship between Aristophanes and Euripides: the harsh insults of a poet’s persona should never be taken as evidence of uncomplicated disdain.

As Bakola points out, the persona’s history could have varying levels of overlap with the poet’s own biography. Nevertheless, despite the almost-certain differences between the playwrights and the characters who bore their name, there will inevitably have been a certain amount of slippage between the perception of the two in the eyes of the audience. The strategy of mocking a persona is always inherently biographical, or at least pseudo-biographical. For this reason, it is impossible to discuss the interaction between the texts of Aristophanes and Cratinus – or, for that matter, Aristophanes and Euripides – while abstracting the playwrights out of the conversation. Dramatic intertextuality so often takes the form of competitive biography that the playwright and his stylistic and personal foibles are integral to the conversation. The poet’s texts and his persona inform each other and become inextricable.

Aristophanes participated in fierce persona struggles with both of his major rivals. In his competition with his contemporary Eupolis, which has been deemed ‘the war of the poets’, the two comedians frequently accused each other of plagiarism and a lack of originality. These arguments center around the authorship of the *Knights* and the extent to which Eupolis’ *Maricas* copied it, although most scholars now agree that accusations of plagiarism in Old Comedy are

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14 For example, sometimes Aristophanes’ persona mentions his prosecution by Cleon; but see Introduction, p. 6, n. 19. Wright (2012) 10 calls the comic persona “radically unstable”.
15 The fragments of this exchange are: *Knights* 1224f. and Σ *Knights* 1224; Σ *Knights* 1291; *Clouds* 551-6; Ar. fr. 58 KA; Eup. fr. 89 KA; Crat. fr. 213. Heath (1990) 153 argues that despite similarities between the *Knights* and the *Maricas*, the latter was “certainly not a mindless reproduction.” See also Ruffell (2011) 367. For this ‘war’ more generally, see Storey (2003a) 278-303 and Kyriakidi (2007).
in large part conventional and meant to counter rivals’ bragging declarations of their own
originality and innovative brilliance.\textsuperscript{16} The slightly earlier competition between Aristophanes and
Cratinus is just as interesting and better-attested than Aristophanes’ competition with Eupolis, so
my focus will be primarily on the struggle between these two, although I will return to Eupolis’
\textit{Autolycus} below.\textsuperscript{17}

Unfortunately, although more is known about Cratinus than Eupolis, our knowledge of
his life and \textit{oeuvre} is still lacunose. Cratinus’ extant fragments number over five hundred from as
many as twenty-nine different plays. Testimonia help fill in a few much-needed details about
Cratinus’ career, such as the fact that he won an impressive nine victories, six in the Dionysia and
three in the Lenaia.\textsuperscript{18} One of the most attractive but methodologically problematic avenues of
information about Cratinus is the extant plays of Aristophanes, which contain six separate
mentions of the older comedian,\textsuperscript{19} and the scholia on Aristophanes, from which we have the

\textsuperscript{16} See Halliwell (1989) on collaboration and Heath (1990) 152 on the construction of a ‘comic repertoire’
from which all comedians could draw while accusing each other of plagiarism. Biles (2001) 199-200 has an
interesting and unusual take on this topic, arguing that the two might have collaborated because they were
allies in an intergenerational conflict that pitted younger poets like Aristophanes and Eupolis against the
older poets like Cratinus, among others. Ruffell (2011) 362-3 rejects all of these models as too simplistic
(although he prefers the ‘repertoire’ model) and argues, “Comic interactions should instead, I argue here,
be seen as diverse and flexible, but based around the twin moves of repetition and innovation, within an
overarching context of aesthetic, cultural, and political competition. This intertextuality operates both
implicitly and explicitly, employing direct satire, appropriation, and irony, but avoids the insertion of
‘quotation marks’, preferring instead the poles of either blatant (personal or literary) abuse and
misrepresentation, or implicit appropriation. This cannot be understood as parody, unless parody is
understood in a very weakened sense.” Ruffell’s model for interaction between comic poets shares much
with my model of developing variations.

\textsuperscript{17} Eupolis and Aristophanes used to be a more common topic than Cratinus and Aristophanes, according
to Sidwell (1995) 57, although this seems to no longer be the case.

\textsuperscript{18} Cratinus test. 5-6 KA.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Acharnians} 848-53 and 1166-73; \textit{Knights} 400 and 526-36; \textit{Peace} 700-3; \textit{Frogs} 357. The first five of these will
be discussed below, as they are the ones that date to 420’s, when Cratinus would have been a familiar
figure. As the line numbers indicate, many of these are little more than passing remarks. Obviously, there
may have been many other such references to Cratinus that are now unfortunately lost.
extremely valuable description of the Pytinē.20 But complete reliance on these scholia for biographical information would be ill-advised.21 Often the scholiasts seem to have done little more than take Aristophanes’ offhand comments at face value and then elaborate on them by adding colorful details.22

The careers of Cratinus and Aristophanes intersected for only a few years: Aristophanes’ first play, the Banqueters, was produced in 427, and Cratinus seems to have no longer been active

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20 Σ Knights 400a, quoted at length below, p. 39.
21 See Lefkowitz (1978), (1981), and (1984), as well as Rosen (2000) 24. Perhaps ironically, this phenomenon points to another surprising commonality between Cratinus and Euripides: not only do they have similar dramatic-textual interactions with Aristophanes, but Aristophanes had a similar influence on their later biographies. For instance, see Roselli (2005) on Euripides’ vegetable-seller mother, which he argues is a comment on Euripides’ tragic style but has often been taken as a genuine testimonium about his mother’s profession, against all logic about the usual influence of successful tragedians.
22 Although the biographical information about Cratinus from Aristophanes and the scholia is a minefield, a fair amount of credible information about his work and poetics can be deduced from the fragments and testimonia. I provide a brief summary here of his long and varied career; for a fuller version see Bakola (2010). We are reasonably well-informed about the content of several of Cratinus’ plays: the Pytinē is the best-attested, but enough is known also about the Dionysalexandros, Nemesis, Archilochoi, Thrattai, and Ploutoi to significantly widen our understanding of Cratinus’ career. On the Dionysalexandros more generally, see Tatti (1986), Rosen (1988) 49-55, Revermann (1997), Bakola (2005), and Wright (2007) 417-20. The plot of the play featured Dionysus pretending to be Alexander so that he could take his place in the famous ‘Judgment of Paris’ and see the goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite naked. Less is known about Cratinus’ Nemesis, but it belonged to the same myth cycle and depicted the conception and birth of Helen following Zeus’ rape of Nemesis. The Nemesis seems to have included an allegorical criticism of Pericles, but here Pericles was analogized to Zeus, perhaps as a commentary on the politician’s too-extensive power over Athens. This brand of understated, subtle political commentary stands in total opposition to Aristophanes’ much more explicit mockery, showing a much broader range of possibilities for the politically minded comedian. The fragment that cinches this allegory (fr. 118) calls Zeus ‘the god of heads’, which connects Zeus to Pericles’ oddly shaped head. For more on the Nemesis, see Wright (2007) 426-7.
after around 421. Despite the brevity of this overlap, the competition between the two poets between 425 and 422 produced a sequence of comedies – Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, and *Wasps* and Cratinus’ *Pytinē* – that exemplify the phenomenon of critiquing each other’s poetic brands through a struggle over personas. In these plays, Aristophanes and Cratinus attack each other in many different ways, including offhand comments spoken by characters, longer and more pointed insults in the *parabasis*, and manipulation of imagery. Aristophanes rhetorically distorts Cratinus’ poetics of Dionysiac inspiration into the ravings of a drunk, senile old man, while Cratinus manipulates Aristophanes’ claims of cleverness into empty sophistry.

This persona manipulation is one form of the interplay of developing variations that I argue was a crucial feature of the dialogue between Aristophanes and Euripides: Cratinus and Aristophanes responsively developed variations on the theme of drunkenness as poetic inspiration.

Cratinus’ name appears twice in Aristophanes’ earliest extant comedy, the *Acharnians* (425 BCE). Although these mentions of the older comedian are brief, they begin a pattern of mockery that Aristophanes expanded upon the next year in his *Knights*. Cratinus is first

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23 The date of the *Banqueters* is attested from P.Oxy. 2737, lines 3-5. Although 421 is usually considered the date of Cratinus’ death, the only evidence is a testimonium of uncertain value from Aristophanes’ *Peace* (ἀπέθανεν / δῆ οἱ Λάκωνες ἐνέβαλον; he died when the Laconians invaded, *Peace* 700-1). ἀπέθανεν seems unambiguous, but the issue is more complicated than this vocabulary choice would lead one to believe. The first and most obvious problem with the testimonium is that we know of no Laconian invasion in 422; see Rosen (1988) 38, with n. 4 for a brief literature review. Furthermore, Trygaeus says Cratinus “fainted dead away; he couldn’t bear to see a cask full of wine broken” (ὡρακιάσας· οὐ γὰρ ἐξηνέσχετο / ἱδὼν πίθον καταγνύμενον οἴνου πλέων, *Peace* 702-3). The words ἀπέθανεν and ἐξηνέσχετο seem to be at odds; has Cratinus passed away, or just passed out? Further complicating the issue, Aristophanes may have taken the idea of smashing Cratinus’ wine casks from Cratinus’ *Pytinē*, in which his wife Comedy threatens to do just that; see Sidwell (1995) 59. Considering that Trygaeus and Hermes are looking for a comedian to help them, the destruction of Cratinus’ wine, the ultimate symbol of his poetics, might signify not the comedian’s literal death but rather his metaphorical death, which is to say his retirement from comic competition that rendered him unable to solve Hermes and Trygaeus’ problem. Aristophanes’ joke might work equally well, albeit in a different way, if Cratinus were sitting in the audience for everyone else in the theater to see. Regardless, this passage from the *Peace* plainly cannot be considered unproblematic evidence that Cratinus was dead in 421. See Heath (1990) 151, Bakola (2005) 3, n. 9 for more on this controversy.
mentioned in a list of people whom Dicaeopolis will not have to tolerate in the *agora*, described as “having an adulterer’s haircut” (Κρατίνος ἀεὶ κεκαρμένος μοιχὸν μιᾷ μαχαίρᾳ, *Ach. 849*). The exact meaning of this description is unclear; Olson suggests that it could imply either that Cratinus was trying to “resemble a stylish young man,” an incongruous and ridiculous appearance for an old man, or that he was so careless about his appearance that he looked like a man whose head had been shaved by a cuckolded husband. Either of these two mutually exclusive, nearly opposite interpretations would fit with later poetic characterizations of Cratinus: in the *parabasis* of the *Knights* Cratinus is portrayed as a pathetic, tottering old man (*Knights 526-36*), and in the *Pytinē* Cratinus’ wife Comedy accuses him of infidelity (frr. 195-6).

The second mention of Cratinus in the *Acharnians* comes unexpectedly (*para prosdokian*) at the end of the Chorus’ curse against Antimachus:

\[
\text{τούτο μὲν αὐτῷ κακὸν ἔν, καθ’ ἐτερον νυκτερινὸν γένοιτο.} \\
\text{ἡπιαλὼν γὰρ οἶκαδ’ ἐξ ἰππασίας βαδίζων,} \\
\text{εἶτα κατὰξεῖ τις αὐτοῦ μεθύων τῆς κεφαλῆς Ὅρεστῆς} \\
\text{μανόμενος, ὅ δὲ λάθον βαλέων} \\
\text{βουλόμενος ἐν σκότω λάβοι} \\
\text{τῇ χειρὶ πέλεθον ἁρτίων κεχεσμένον.} \\
\text{ἐπάξειεν δ’ ἐχὼν} \\
\text{τὸν μάρμαρον, καὶ πειδ’ ἄμαρ-} \\
\text{τῶν βάλοι Κρατίνον.} \\
\]

(*Acharnians 1162-73*)

This is one curse I have for him. The next is a nighttime curse, that when he’s returning home from horse practice with a fever, he may come across some mad Orestes drunk out of his mind: and may he, wanting to throw a stone in the dark, pick up a freshly-laid turd with his hand. When he has his missile, may he hurl it and miss and hit Cratinus.

Cratinus is depicted as the type of person who could reasonably be found in a *kōmos* with ‘drunk

\[^{24}\text{Olson (2002) ad loc.}\]
Orestes’. Aristophanes revisited this image of Cratinus-the-drunkard in the *Knights* in much greater detail.

In these two early mentions of Cratinus, Aristophanes established the terms with which he criticized his older and more distinguished competitor. Aristophanes, a newcomer onto the Old Comedy scene, used these references to Cratinus to help solidify his position in relation to a rival who was already well-established within the genre. Aristophanes is mocking not Cratinus himself, but Cratinus’ persona, and his descriptions of the older comedian as a drunk and an adulterer are meant as a commentary on his poetics more than his personal habits. What appears to be an insult to his messy deportment and attire are actually references to the sloppiness of Cratinus’ comedies, a motif that Aristophanes derived from Cratinus himself, who in one fragment declares that his poetic inspiration is so overwhelming that it cannot be controlled.

Very early in his career, Aristophanes was already manipulating Cratinus’ own imagery toward more insulting ends.

The *Acharnians* won first place in 425, beating Cratinus’ *Kheimazomenoi*, with Eupolis’ *Noumeniai* taking third. Although Aristophanes’ persona in the *Acharnians* can hardly be described as ‘shy’ about his poetic talents, his victory here was justification to step up his attacks on Cratinus from offhand remarks to prolonged parabatic criticism. At the very least, this is the

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25 In fact, this is also where he began to establish textual relationships with the other two major dramatists in his life, Eupolis and Euripides. There is significant scholarly debate over whether Dicaeopolis, usually considered a one-for-one analogue for Aristophanes because of their both having problems with Cleon (although see Goldhill (1990) 194 for a tension-filled resonance rather than easy correspondence), is actually supposed to represent Eupolis because of the similarities in their names; for a cross-section of this debate see Bowie (1982), Sutton (1988), Olson (1990), and Sidwell (1995) 63.

26 Fr. 198, discussed below, pp. 37-8. See also Rosen (2000) 30-1.
explanation ‘Aristophanes’ gives in the parabasis of the Knights for his more aggressive stance.27 He explains that the Knights is the first comedy he is producing in his own name after presenting his earliest plays under the name of his frequent producer Callistratus because he was afraid of poor treatment at the hands of an audience of philistines who failed to appreciate other initially successful comedians (Knights 512-9).28 As a believable explanation, this is insufficient for several reasons: first of all, the three comedians he offers as examples, Magnes, Cratinus, and Crates, are all represented as poets who were successful in the beginning of their careers and then heckled later, which would hardly be a concern for the young Aristophanes and does not explain why a victory would change his mind about hiding behind Callistratus.29 Whatever the rationalization, the attacks on Cratinus in the Knights are undeniably more pointed than those in the Acharnians:

εἶτα Κρατίνου μεμνημένος, ὄς πολλῷ ῥέσας ποτ’ ἐπαίνῳ
dia tōn αφελῶν πεδίων ἔρρει, καὶ τῆς στάσεως παρασύρων
ἐφόρει τὰς δρύς καὶ τὰς πλατάνους καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς προβελώμουνος,
ἀσαι δ’ οὐκ ἦν ἐν ἔμποσοιῳ πλήν ‘Δωροὶ συκοπέδελα,’
καὶ ‘τέκτονες εὐπαλάμων ὠμοίων’ οὕτως ἠνθῆσεν ἐκεῖνος. 530
νυνὶ δ’ ὑμεῖς αὐτὸν ὀρὸντες παραληροῦντ’ οὐκ ἠλέειτε,
ἐκπιπτοῦσών τῶν ἡλέκτρων καὶ τοῦ τόνου οὐκέτ’ ἐνόντος
tῶν θ’ ἁρμονίων διαχασκουσῶν· ἀλλὰ γέρων ὄν περιέρρει,
ὡσπερ Κοννᾶς, στέφανον μὲν οὖν δίψῃ δ’ ἀπολωλὼς,
ὁ χρίν διὰ τὰς προτέρας νίκας πάνεν ἐν τῷ πρυτανείῳ,
καὶ μὴ ληρεῖν ἀλλὰ θεᾶσθαι λιπαρὸν παρὰ τῷ Διονύσῳ.

(Knights 526-36)

27 The relationship between the parabasis of the Knights and the rest of the play is a controversial one. The parabasis is almost completely dedicated to issues of comic competition and poetics, and while Aristophanes did write many comedies focused on literary issues, such as the Thesmophoriazusae and Frogs, and others that combined the literary with the political, such as the Acharnians, the Knights is almost exclusively political. See Rosen (1988) 59-82 on how the Knights fits into the iambographic tradition, which would seem to connect the iambic-style attack on Cleon throughout the play with Aristophanes’ evaluation of his comic predecessors. The vast majority of the scholarship on the Knights focuses on the political aspects of the play. For an excellent literature review, see Lowe (2008) 39, n. 38.
28 Reckford (1987) 123-30 is an excellent reading of this passage. For comedians’ characterizations of their audience as either clever or incompetent, see Revermann (2006b) 102-3.
The poet remembers Cratinus, who once flowed over smooth plains in a torrent of praise, uprooting and sweeping away oaks, plane-trees, and rival poets. Nobody sang any song in a symposium except ‘fig-sandaled Doro’ and ‘fashioners of skillfully-wrought hymns’, that’s how popular he was. But you don’t even pity him when you see him babbling now; his lyre has no tuning-pegs or strings. The old man meanders around like Connas, wearing a dried-out wreath, perishing of thirst when he should be toasted in the Prytaneum because of his past victories, and instead of acting like a fool he should watch the dramas from the front row, next to the statue of Dionysus, anointed with perfume.

Two of the three comedians held up in the *parabasis* as examples, Magnes and Crates, were no longer competitors when the *Knights* was produced. But listed between them, somewhat awkwardly, is the still-active Cratinus. The sequencing could be significant and pointed, indicating subtly that Cratinus is so over-the-hill that even those who began their careers after him have retired. Furthermore, Cratinus likely was neither extremely old nor had failing mental powers; Malcolm Heath argues that Cratinus might have been under 60 years old, and since he had won the comic competition of 426 and come in second place in 425, he is unlikely to have been senile. Aristophanes’ portrait of a comedian who has not had a victory in so long that his wreaths have dried up is clearly a ploy rather than an accurate reflection of reality. At any rate, Aristophanes’ depiction of Cratinus is far from unambiguously negative, and compared to his cruel mockery of the dead Crates (*Knights* 537-40), the description of Cratinus is surprisingly complimentary. One might see an implied compliment in the fact that Aristophanes devotes as

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30 Magnes was long dead, but Heath (1990) 143-4 estimates that Crates’ last play was produced around 427, so his death was quite recent.
31 Ruffell (2002) 142-4 argues that the order is insulting, while Biles (2001) argues that the order was somehow conventional, since it appears the same way in the didascalia; one should note, however, that the ordering may have become conventional later on because of Aristophanes.
32 Heath (1990) 149.
many lines in the parabasis to Cratinus (526-36) as he does to Magnes (520-5) and Crates (537-40) combined. Criticism of the older comedian is mixed with recognition of his past success and immense popularity, and also combined with jabs not at Cratinus himself but at the Athenian populace for failing to appreciate comic brilliance appropriately.\(^{33}\)

Aristophanes’ portrayal of Cratinus is either a backhanded compliment or a very friendly insult. He could hardly deny the brilliant success of Cratinus’ earlier career.\(^{34}\) Instead, he emphasizes the natural advantage of youth over age, portraying Comedy as a fickle hetaira who prefers younger and more virile men, both sexually and artistically: \(\piολλὸν \ γὰρ \ δὴ \ \piερασάντων\ αὐτῆς \ όλιγος \ χαρίσασθαι\) (although many make passes at her, she grants her favor to few; Knights 517).\(^{35}\) But the most fascinating aspect of Aristophanes’ parabatic criticism of Cratinus is the extent to which Aristophanes incorporated Cratinus’ own imagery and poetic signatures. There is evidence that the metaphors used by Aristophanes to represent Cratinus’ failing comedic powers – wine and drunkenness (534-6) and the image of Cratinus’ poetic genius as a river flowing out of control (526-8) – are negatively skewed adaptations of metaphors that Cratinus himself had used to describe his poetics. This similarity was first suggested by a scholiast on Knights 526:

\[\text{δοκεὶ δὲ μοι Ἀριστοφάνης αἶφ' ὅν ἐἰπε Κρατῖνος περὶ αὐτοῦ μεγαληγορῶν, ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν τροπὴν εἰληφέναι· ὁ γὰρ Κρατῖνος οὕτως ἔσκυψεν ἐν τῇ Πυτίνῃ· ἀναξ Ἀπολλον, τῶν ἐπῶν τοῦ ῥείματος, καναχοῦσα πηγαί· δωδεκάκρουνον <τὸ> στόμα},\]

\(^{33}\) Scholtz (2004) 289, n. 78 also suggests that the Knights “reprises elements” of Cratinus’ Ploutoi, suggesting an even deeper, albeit subtler connection with the older poet embedded into the plot of the play, not merely in the parabasis.

\(^{34}\) Luppe (2000) 16-7.

\(^{35}\) This is the interpretation of Knights 515-7 of Biles (2002) 184-5, who notes that the verbs peirāν and charizesthai are often used of sexual pursuit; on peirāν see also Bakola (2008) 21.
Aristophanes seems to me to have taken this metaphor from the boasts Cratinus made about himself. For Cratinus praised himself thus in the Pytinē:

Good God, what a flow of words!
Streams splattering, mouth twelve-spouted,
Ilissos in his gullet. Words fail me!
If someone doesn’t shut his gob
He’ll flood the whole place with poetry!\(^{36}\)

Although the scholiast seems to have gotten the chronology confused if the character of Cratinus in the Pytinē is the object of this exclamation, the connection between his poetry and rushing water may well have predated Aristophanes’ Knights. As for Cratinus’ association with drunkenness, one of his most famous fragments is fr. 203, ὕδωρ δὲ πίνων οὐδὲν ἄν τέκοι σοφὸν ([a man] could create nothing wise while drinking water).\(^{37}\) As in the Acharnians, Aristophanes’ strategy in the Knights parabasis was to activate mental associations that the audience already held about Cratinus and his unique comic brand and then present negative variations on them.

In addition to the long attack on Cratinus in the parabasis, there is also a brief jab against the older poet earlier in the play at Knights 400, when the Chorus says, εἴ σε μὴ μισῶ, γενοίμην ἐν Κρατίνου κώδιον (If I do not hate you, may I be made a blanket in Cratinus’ home). A scholion on the line suggests that Aristophanes is implying here that Cratinus’ drunkenness has led him to become incontinent, hence the danger of being a blanket in his house. The most important part of this scholion on Knights 400 is not this potentially questionable interpretation

\(^{36}\) trans. Rosen.

\(^{37}\) For more on wine and water as different sources of inspiration, see Crowther (1979).
of Aristophanes’ insult,\textsuperscript{38} but its description of Cratinus’ reaction to Aristophanes’ abuse:

Cratinus’ blanket: a κῴδιον is a blanket made out of fleece. He is mocking Cratinus for being an incontinent drunkard. Cratinus himself was also a poet of Old Comedy, older than Aristophanes, one of the best. “May I be,” he says, “a κῴδιον in house of Cratinus, so that he can urinate on me, if I don’t hate you.” I believe that this really irritated Cratinus: even though he had retired from comic competition, he came back to write the drama Πυτίνη, in which he used the same arrangement and staged himself as a drunk. In the play, Comedy was Cratinus’ wife, and she wanted to get a divorce from him on the basis of abuse.

Surely what “irritated” (παροξυνθεῖς) Cratinus was not this throwaway line, but the fact that between this insult and the longer one in the parabasis, the Knights seems to make a project of depicting Cratinus as a senile drunkard whose glory days of writing comedies were so long past that the rest of Athens had forgotten about his existence. The most interesting part of this

\textsuperscript{38} Ruffell (2002) 145 argues, however, that the audience’s first mental association with incontinence would be not drunkenness, but old age. Neither interpretation is clearly preferable, since Aristophanes mocked both Cratinus’ old age and his drunkenness in the Acharnians.

\textsuperscript{39} The scholiast seems to have made a mistake here: Cratinus was not in retirement in 424, and in fact came in second that year with the Saturoi and also came in second place in 425 with the Kheimazomenoi, behind the Acharnians but ahead of Eupolis’ Noumeniai; see Ruffell (2002) 143. Despite the scholiast’s mistake on this fairly basic and obvious point, most scholars feel that his testimony on the basic plot of the Pytinē is still reliable.
testimonium is the scholiast’s assertion that in his comic rebuttal, Cratinus “used the same arrangement” (οἰκονομίᾳ τε κεχρημένον τοιαύτη) that Aristophanes had used to attack him in the Knights. The idea that Cratinus was a drunk may have originally been his own invention, but Aristophanes had developed a variation on it for his own purposes. As Zachary Biles eloquently puts it, “A rival was forced to witness his material being pirated and recast to his own disadvantage, while the perpetrator proclaimed his own comic genius in the process.”

In the Pytinē, Cratinus retook control over his own drunken persona. In a brilliant stroke, Cratinus took the images at the center of Aristophanes’ mockery (himself as an aging drunk, Comedy as a fickle girlfriend) and made them the heart of his rebuttal. In the Pytinē, Cratinus put his own persona on the stage as a comic hero whose wife, Comedy, is fed up with his alcoholism and decides to leave him. The fragments show that the terms Comedy used were the legal vocabulary of divorce, so Cratinus was clearly depicting the threat of an official break between himself and his genre. Comedy complains of several offenses, including infidelity, saying that Cratinus now prefers to chase after young wines (οἶνισκον replacing the expected νεάνισκον, frr. 195-6); Cratinus may have been picking up on Aristophanes’ mockery of his adulterous

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41 There seems to be another image hijack also at work here: Heath (1990) 150-1 argues that Cratinus rebuking the citizens in the Pytinē for shirking their naval duties (frr. 210-1) is a manipulation of the personified triremes in the second Knights parabasis (1300-15). This technique is related to but a bit different from the phenomenon I am focusing on because he is not directly using the part of the parabasis in which Aristophanes made fun of him, but instead looking at a part of the parabasis where Aristophanes was glorifying himself.
42 Hall (2000) 410-1 places Comedy in the Pytinē within the greater context of female representations of poetry in Old Comedy. She concludes (p. 415) “The female body – virginal or pregnant, overweight or slimmed down, performing fellatio or too ugly to have sex with, married, serially sexually abused or raped by Timotheus – was something which the poets of Old Comedy discovered was good to think with when it came to understanding poetry and its relationship with poets.” See also Sommerstein (2005) 163-4.
appearance in the *Acharnians*. A chorus of Cratinus’ friends attempted to convince Comedy to stay with her wayward husband. Apparently they were successful and a reconciliation followed, although it is unclear whether the chorus and Comedy joined forces in getting Cratinus to curb his consumption of wine, or, more likely, Cratinus managed to convince his wife that drunkenness was not a hindrance to the writing of comedies, but actually a beneficial source of inspiration. At some point in the play, someone (Comedy?) declares his or her intent to smash all of Cratinus’ wine-flasks, a threat that might have inspired the title of the comedy; a *Pytinē* is a wine-flask woven out of fibers, and therefore invulnerable to smashing.

Cratinus outmaneuvered Aristophanes by taking the younger comedian’s criticisms and detoxifying them. Perhaps the most galling part of this rebuttal for Aristophanes (or at least Aristophanes’ persona) is that Cratinus managed to successfully rebut the criticisms of the *Knights* without even explicitly mentioning that he was doing so. A scholion on *Knights* 531 does claim that somewhere in the *Pytinē* Cratinus accused Aristophanes of plagiarizing Eupolis.

Additionally, Cratinus’ most famous and oft-quoted fragment describing an audience member as

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43 Potentially she also accused him of having Drunkenness as his mistress; it depends on whether the scholion (test. 2) should read ‘σχολάζοι δὲ μέθῃ’ or ‘σχολάζοι δὲ Μέθῃ’.
44 Rosen (2000) 32-3 makes the argument for the latter interpretation, and I believe that it is now the general consensus.
45 In a fascinating instance of early intertextuality, the verb used for smashing here is συγκεραυνώ, a word often associated with Archilochus because of his fr. 120, ὡς Διωνύσου ἄνακτος καλὸν ἐξέρχεται μέλος/ ὀίδα διθύραμβον ὁμοιοι συγκεραυνωθεὶς φρένας. For generally Dionysiac and dithyrambic associations with the word συγκεραυνώ, see Mendelsohn (1992).
46 Biles (2002) 183-4 uses this as a piece of evidence to support Rosen’s argument that Cratinus was eventually victorious.
47 Ruffell (2002) 155 argues that mentioning the *Knights* by name would “shift the emphasis from Cratinus’ own technique and content.”
48 ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ Κρατῖνος ἔγραψε τὴν *Πυτίνην*, δεικνὺς ὅτι οὐκ ἠλήρησεν, ἐν ὣς κακῶς λέγει τὸν Ἀριστοφάνην ὡς τὰ Εὐπόλιδος λέγοντα (Hearing this, Cratinus wrote the *Pytinē* to show that he wasn’t a babbler, a play in which he insults Aristophanes for plagiarizing the words of Eupolis). For this specific accusation of plagiarism, see Sidwell (1993).
a 'Euripidaristophanizer' (fr. 342) might be from the Pytinē:⁴⁹

τίς δὲ σὺ; κομψός τις έροιτο θεατής
ὑπολεπτολόγος, γνωμιδιώκτης, εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζων.

And who are you? Some clever spectator might ask,
An oversubtle maxim-chasing Euripidaristophanizer.

Although the valence of this insult and its intended object are much-debated, Cratinus was clearly characterizing the type of poetry that both Euripides and Aristophanes wrote as being outwardly clever and sophisticated but essentially without substance, in contrast to his own poetics of Dionysiac inspiration.⁵⁰

The Pytinē was a success, and it won first place over Aristophanes’ contribution that year, the Clouds. Aristophanes’ defeat in turn created a new situation for him to exercise the already-indignant persona from the Knights who had accused the citizens of Athens of underappreciating its comedians as they grew older. To this complaint he could now add another: the audience was not only unfaithful to comedians who used to be their favorites, but also had terrible taste and was unable to discern true poetic brilliance.⁵¹

In the Pytinē, Cratinus defends and reaffirms his poetic self-representation in the clearest, least ambiguous manner imaginable: he literally stages a debate that his persona wins. Comedy and her husband Cratinus argue about whether wine hurts or helps their relationship, and when Cratinus-the-character wins within the play, Cratinus-the-poet implies in a broader sense that

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⁴⁹ Luppe (2000) 19 points out that, logistically speaking, this quote is quite likely to have come from the Pytinē, since the overlap between the two comedians was relatively brief and it makes more sense after the extended Euripides parody in the Acharnians.

⁵⁰ Bakola (2008) 19-20 argues that this insult was part of a program on Cratinus’ part to depict Aristophanes and Euripides as overly sophistic.

⁵¹ Wright (2012), especially ch. 2, argues that this ‘anger’ at having lost is likely to have been a rhetorical stance and that winning or losing was not of much concern to comedians; however, his is the minority view.
his metapoetic claims to inspiration and genius have been confirmed. Additionally, as a playwright probably could not have predicted with any certainty, the success of Cratinus-the-character within the play is paralleled by the success that Cratinus-the-poet achieved through the victory of the Pytinē in the contest that year; in the plot a personification of Comedy approves of his wine-soaked poetics, and outside the world of the play the citizens of Athens appear to have agreed.

There is no way to tell what it was about the Pytinē that appealed to the judges, but it is possible that this was the first time that a comedian had used the strategy of making the comic hero the comedian’s own doppelganger and that it was a huge shock to the audience when the protagonist’s name was revealed. The play seems to have had significant literary repercussions, which might imply that it was a bold and original move that his competitors considered worth copying. Not only does Cratinus accuse Aristophanes in the Pytinē of being a plagiarizer, he may have done so while adding something completely novel and exciting to the comic repertoire.

Although it is impossible to prove that Cratinus’ defensive strategy in the Pytinē was completely unprecedented, it is unlikely that the play would have generated as much of a dramatic response as it did if Cratinus had simply reused a common comedic trope. The fallout from the Pytinē was substantial. Aristophanes’ immediate reaction is visible in the Wasps, one of the two comedies he produced in the Lenaia of 422. In the Wasps, Aristophanes takes the basic plot arc and many of the themes of the Pytinē and reuses them without mentioning Cratinus or the Pytinē by name. He is more explicit in the revised parabasis of the Clouds, the comedy that originally lost to the Pytinē. In the second version of the Clouds, Aristophanes’ persona expresses extreme annoyance at the audience’ lack of good taste in preferring Cratinus’ contribution over
his own.\textsuperscript{52} Finally, Eupolis seems to have reused Cratinus’ *Pytinē* strategy in his *Autolycus*, staged only a few years later in 420.

In the *parabasis* of the *Knights*, Aristophanes fully inhabits the persona he began to develop in the *Acharnians*, a persona who is young, cocky, and utterly dismissive of older comedians. He claims that his earlier victories have generated a momentum that carries through the *Knights*. The success of the *Pytinē* halted that momentum and put a dent in the rhetoric of Aristophanes’ persona that positioned him as far superior to any older poet. That kind of persona could hardly allow a snub like the *Pytinē* to go without a response, but Cratinus had made it clear that he was capable of manipulating Aristophanes’ direct mockery to his own advantage.

Furthermore, as Ralph Rosen points out, Aristophanes could have retaliated with a comedy in which his persona defended his poetics more explicitly, but chose not to do so.\textsuperscript{53} Such an obvious imitation of Cratinus’ successful strategy could have backfired on Aristophanes; even if he managed to retake control over his own persona and prove that he was more than a sophist and a quack, he would still have implicitly confirmed Cratinus’ brilliance.

\textsuperscript{52} The extent of the revision of the *Clouds* is too contested of an issue for me to discuss at length; one of the hypotheses of the *Clouds* claims that Aristophanes wanted to restage the play after its original loss and that he revised it substantially, especially the *parabasis*, the debate between the Just and Unjust arguments, and the burning of Socrates’ Thinkery. On this hypothesis, see Dover (1968) lxxx-xcvi. On the reconstruction of the plays, see Hubbard (1986) and Tarrant (1991). Tarrant argues that it was the first *Clouds* that would have influenced Plato and Xenophon, because the revised version was never staged. Reckford (1987) 394 argues that the scholiast exaggerates and “the play we have is mostly identical with the play performed in 423 BC,” although his is a minority viewpoint. Although the extent of Aristophanes’ revision of the *Clouds* is in dispute, the *parabasis* at least was mostly rewritten into a version that claims that although the *Clouds* was the “cleverest of his comedies” (ταύτην σοφώτατ᾽... τῶν ἐμῶν κωμῳδιῶν, *Clouds* 522), he had been defeated “by vulgar men even though he deserved to win” (ὑπ’ ἀνδρῶν φορτικῶν / ἡττηθεὶς οὐκ ἄξιος ὤν, *Clouds* 524-5). Cratinus is not mentioned by name, but he is dismissed as being φορτικός, common and coarse, a foil for Aristophanes’ more intelligent comedy. The *parabasis* goes on to declare the poet new and original (545-8) and accuse Eupolis of plagiarizing the *Knights* in his *Maricas* (549-559).

\textsuperscript{53} Rosen (2000) 25. Rosen points out that no matter how closely we choose to identify Aristophanes with some of his characters – especially Dicaeopolis and Bdelycleon – he never actually stages ‘Aristophanes’ as a comic hero, an option that the *Pytinē* proves was open to him.
Instead of attacking Cratinus explicitly, the Wasps presents itself as a comeback play by mirroring the plot of the Pytinē in many ways. The elderly Philocleon corresponds to Cratinus, while Bdelycleon corresponds to Aristophanes; the younger man attempts to reform the elder and is initially successful, but ultimately fails. Aristophanes’ engagement with Cratinus’ Pytinē in the Wasps is a subtle undercurrent throughout the play, not merely a matter of a few lines in a prologue or parabasis, although the parabasis does indicate that Aristophanes wants his audience to know that he was annoyed about his loss the year before:

οὐδὲν χείρων παρὰ τοῖσι σοφοῖσ νενόμισται,  
eἰ παρελαίνων τοὺς ἀντιπάλους τὴν ἐπίνοιαν ἐννέτριψεν.  

(Wasps 1049-50)

The poet hasn’t lost his reputation among clever people  
If he shivered his concept while charging at his adversaries.

Aside from this general reference to his loss, the Wasps’ interaction with the Pytinē is so understated that it could easily have gone unnoticed by the audience, Cratinus, and even Aristophanes himself, an unconscious echo of a comedy that had made a huge impact. However, considering how sharply vigilant comedians were to perceived plagiarism of their works, it is unlikely that the comedians would have been unaware of the Wasps’ extensive borrowing from the Pytinē, even if the audience was ignorant.

As early as the prologue of the play, perhaps in reference to the Pytinē, the slave Sosias responds to a hypothetical audience member speculating that drinking is Philocleon’s vice by replying that alcoholics can still be effective (οὐδαμῶς γ’, ἐπεὶ / αὕτη γε χρηστῶν ἐστὶν ἀνδρῶν  

ἡ νόσος; 79-80), perhaps a subtle reference to the ‘drunk’ Cratinus’ ability to win comic

55 Wright (2013) 208-9 argues that the Wasps’ self-positioning as a ‘comeback play’ ought not be taken too seriously.
competitions. In the *Wasps*, Aristophanes has made an amusing change; the protagonist needs to be cured not of drunkenness, but of a more serious disease. He is a *φιληλιαστής*, a man with a mania for jury duty (88). The nature of Philocleon’s obsession is clever and unexpected, a reversal of the *Pytinē*, where Cratinus shows no interest in the law courts at all, but his wife Comedy is the one using legal terms and seeking a formal divorce. Biles maps out the extensive similarities between the two comedies: in both plays, the chorus is a group of sympathetic friends of the protagonist, Cratinus in the *Pytinē* and Philocleon in the *Wasps*. Although both old men repent over the course of their respective comedies and make a cursory attempt to reform themselves, they then backslide further into their vices, claiming that they are too weak to hold to their new resolve. A second reformation attempt is made, which is again initially successful, but the play ends with a rebellion and affirmation of the protagonist’s original state.

The similarities that Biles identifies between the plots of the *Pytinē* and *Wasps* are numerous and compelling, but also puzzling. Aristophanes is adopting a plot in which the old men, Cratinus and Philocleon, walk away victorious without being altered significantly in any way. Aristophanes’ own cipher within the play, the young, exasperated Bdelycleon, ends up being ineffectual. The choice of this type of plot makes more sense for Cratinus than it does for Aristophanes, because in the hands of Cratinus it was a reaffirmation of his brilliance as a

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56 Although drunkenness is only one of the possible illnesses for Philocleon that Xanthias and Sosias raise and then reject, Thorburn (2005) argues that throughout the play Philocleon’s addiction is consistently portrayed as analogous to alcoholism, strengthening the tie between Philocleon and Cratinus in the *Pytinē* (p. 51). Sidwell (1990), however, argues that the ‘disease’ is figured as being like *erōs*.
58 Biles (2002) 192 is a very extensive chart of the similarities between these two plays.
comedian, whereas for Aristophanes it seems only to rehash his failure. But Biles’ interpretation relies on a reconstruction of the Pytinē that is counter to the general consensus: he argues that Comedy attempts to teach Cratinus how to compose without being drunk, but Cratinus rebels and returns at the end to his poetics of drunken inspiration. Most, however, believe that Cratinus ultimately convinced Comedy and the chorus that his was the superior way. Although this may appear a relatively minor distinction, this alteration changes how the Wasps develops its own variation on the themes of the Pytinē. In Biles’ interpretation, Aristophanes makes the plot of the Pytinē his own primarily through an alteration in theme; the focus on the law court and Cleon is characteristically Aristophanic, just as drunkenness is characteristically Cratinean. But in the consensus view, the endings of the two plays are fundamentally different: in the Pytinē, Cratinus convinces Comedy and the chorus of the value of his drunken poetics, whereas in the Wasps, Philocleon recognizes that Bdelycleon is correct in his assessment of the worthlessness of the law courts, but finds himself unable to give up the law court entirely and instead creates a new domestic court, until at the end of the play he finds a new vice that he prefers: drunkenness. His drunken buffoonery is such that he ends the play as the object of many lawsuits, even though it had begun with him gleefully convicting all defendants.

Aristophanes has altered Cratinus’ model so that the protagonist’s vices, while not ultimately curbed, are at least no longer celebrated. Instead, almost immediately before the final dance, the chorus praises Bdelycleon for his filial devotion and intelligence (1462–73). They claim that in his debate with his father, Bdelycleon triumphed on every point (τί γὰρ ἐκεῖνος

59 For Biles (2002) 198, the ‘rehabilitation’ theme of the Wasps echoes into Aristophanes’ historical biography and his hope for success after the failure of the Clouds, although Philocleon’s rehabilitation at the end of the play is hardly complete.
60 Biles (2002) 186.
61 See p. 41, n. 44 above.
ἀντιλέγων / οὐ κρείττων ἦν, *Wasps* 1470-1). Although Philocleon ends the play as a drunken fool, Bdelycleon – whose position is clearly analogous to Aristophanes’, even if the two should not be identified too closely – is vindicated as the cleverer of the two. In the *Pytinē*, Cratinus had insulted Aristophanes for his obsession with cleverness. The *Wasps* takes the sting out of this insult and revalorizes Aristophanes’ poetic self-image, just as the *Pytinē* had done to the *Knights*.

Aristophanes was not the only comedian to notice that the technique Cratinus used in the *Pytinē* to respond to Aristophanes’ criticisms was original and effective; Eupolis also chose to involve himself in the competition to manipulate his rivals’ personas. Bakola argues convincingly that Eupolis consistently represented himself as a teacher of the polis, a fairly common stance for a comedian but one that Eupolis adopted with particular zest by telling the audience that although they had been dismissed from class a long time ago, he was summoning them back and telling them to bring their writing tablets along to take notes (fr. 192). Just as Aristophanes contributed his own variation on Cratinus’ poetics of inspiration by depicting him as an aging drunkard, he used a similar tactic against Eupolis, manipulating his competitor’s didactic persona and portraying him as not an educator, but the kind of man who lurks around wrestling schools hoping to catch a glimpse of naked prepubescent boys (*Wasps* 1023-5, *Peace* 762-3). In

62 The play celebrates Bdelycleon’s clever argumentation despite the fact that the slaves in the prologue declare that the play will be neither too clever nor too coarse. See Wright (2013) for an argument that the *Wasps* claims to be a middlebrow comedy, an explicit rejection of Aristophanes’ usual intellectual comedy that does not stoop to total vulgarity.


64 *Wasps* 1023-5: ἀρθεὶς δὲ μέγας καὶ τιμηθεὶς ὡς οὐδεὶς πώποτ' ἐν ὑμῖν, / οὐκ ἐκτελέσαι † φησὶν ἐπαρθεὶς οὐδ᾽ ὀγκῶσαι τὸ φρόνημα, / οὐδὲ παλαίστρας περικωμᾶζειν πειρῶν (although he has been lifted up and honored by you like no other poet, he says that he has not achieved his goal and hasn’t let it go to his head, nor does he hang around wrestling schools and hitting on boys); *Peace* 762-3: καὶ γὰρ πρότερον πράξας κατὰ νοῦν οὐχὶ παλαίστρας περινοστῶν / παῖδας ἐπείρων (I haven’t let [my success] get to my head and been visiting wrestling schools and hitting on boys). For πειράω as a verb of sexual pursuit, see above, p. 37, n. 35. Interestingly, both references to Eupolis imply that his success was somehow tied to the pederasty of his persona.
his quest to retake control over his persona, Eupolis seems to have looked toward Cratinus’ success as an example. In 419 he wrote the Autolycus, a comedy in which the main character is a young wrestling student who looks for advice to his wise teacher, named Eupolis. The entire interaction here is almost identical to the one between Aristophanes and Cratinus only than a few years earlier.

In these interactions between Aristophanes, Cratinus, and Eupolis, comedians make use of several different tools to react to the jibes of a competitor. They mock each other by name at length in the parabasis, as Aristophanes does in the Knights, either with pointed criticism or criticism mixed with praise. They also insult each other indirectly, insinuating (or stating outright) that only a foolish audience would prefer their rivals’ works to their own, as in the Clouds. In the parabasis or elsewhere in the play, a comedian might also activate and then subvert the metaphors that his competitors used to characterize their own poetics, manipulating those images toward a more negative connotation. In the Pytinē and Autolycus respectively, Cratinus and Eupolis used a very explicit form of self-defense, staging characters with their own names as reaffirmation and revalorization of their earlier self-representation, thereby taking the sting out of their competitors’ criticisms and guiding them back toward their original positive valence. Comedians also incorporate variations on each other’s best ideas into their own works, making

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those ideas part of a common repertoire. Apart from these more complex strategies, they also pepper their comedies with snide offhand barbs aimed at the idiosyncrasies of their competitors, or at the very least, at the eccentricity of their competitors’ dramatic personas.

The creation and manipulation of comic personas is only possible because of sophisticated poetic self-consciousness. Aristophanes, Cratinus, and Eupolis all seem to identify the hallmarks of their own styles and use them to fashion a unique comic brand. They were also very sensitive to other poets’ attempts to encroach upon that self-representation. For Aristophanes, the construction of what it meant to be Aristophanic was an ongoing process that involved intentional response to other poets’ challenges. This increased awareness of what characterizes one’s own work, along with a sensitivity to the different ways in which a play can develop variations on the themes of earlier plays, is also evident in the intertextual interactions between Aristophanes and Euripides. Aristophanes’ rivalry with other comedians naturally has many differences from his relationship with Euripides; unlike Aristophanes and Cratinus, Aristophanes and Euripides were working within different genres and not in direct competition with each other. But as I will show in later chapters, Euripides responded to Aristophanes much as a comedian would, although without the use of a persona: by reusing in a self-conscious manner the tropes that Aristophanes pointed out as being characteristically Euripidean.

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66 Heath (1990) 152 is particularly clear on this point: “Reading through the comic fragments in bulk gives the impression that there was a common pool or repertoire of comic material: anything put on stage in a comedy would become public property and be absorbed into the repertoire, so that all comic poets contributed to it; and all drew on it, although each would aim to give a new and original twist to the material which he borrowed, so that the repertoire constantly evolved. If this was so, then any poet could lay claim to originality (since he gave the pooled material a novel twist); and any rival could make a counter-claim of plagiarism (since the material was in part drawn from the pool). Both claims have to be evaluated (and discounted) in the light of this constant process of exchange and evolution of material. The charges of plagiarism are part of a system of ritualized insults; they are not meant to be believed, but to make the other party lose face.”
II. The “word-making, verse-testing tongue” (Frogs 826)

One of the reasons why it is so surprising that intertexts with Aristophanes in Euripides’ tragedies have been so little scrutinized is that Euripides is, indisputably, a highly allusive tragedian. Some might argue that allusion is inherent to tragedy as a genre, since the plots are often derived from the epic cycle. But Euripides seems to have been a tragedian who was particularly interested in and self-conscious about the relationship between his work and other texts. Although intertexts with specific comedies in Euripides’ tragedies have rarely been studied, his allusions to epic and other tragedy are well-documented, especially his intertexts with Aeschylus.

There are several Euripidean plays that make obvious reference to the works of Aeschylus. The brief allusion to Aeschylus’ Seven Against Thebes in the Phoenissae was likely too erudite for the majority of the audience to have noticed: Eteocles tells Creon that since the enemy is already at the gates, it would be a waste of time to mention the generals by name (ὄνομα δ᾽ ἑκάστου διατρὶβὴ πολλὴ λέγειν / ἐχθρῶν ὑπ᾽ αὐτῶις τείχεσιν καθημένωι, 751-2). Most scholars agree that this recusatio is a backhanded swipe at the very lengthy and detailed descriptions in Aeschylus’ Seven Against Thebes, a play that few (if any) people in the Theater of Dionysus would have been old enough to see when it was first produced, although it may have been reperformed recently.

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67 Burian (1997) 179 wrote that tragedy is “not casually or occasionally intertextual, but always and inherently so.”
68 See Introduction, p. 6, n. 18.
69 For some reason, Sophocles is not implicated nearly as often in these intertextual discussions, even though (or perhaps because) he was a living competitor of Euripides instead of a dead author of plays that had long since become classics.
70 Aélion (1983) 205.
Similarly, the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* briefly alludes to the ending of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, but then rejects it by taking as its premise the idea that Athena was not successful at convincing all of the Furies to let go of their anger (*IT* 970-1).

Allusions to Aeschylus have been located in other Euripidean plays as well. But the *Electra* and especially the *Orestes* are indisputably the plays with the longest, deepest, and least contestable involvement with the works of Aeschylus. Froma Zeitlin argues that the *Orestes* exemplifies the senescence and death of a literary tradition, a genre that is completely played out. Christian Wolff points out how poor the fit frequently is between the *Orestes* and the texts it references, which might indicate that the play constitutes a commentary of sorts on the nature and limits of tragic intertextuality. So many tragedies are variations on the same myths and the same characters that this kind of intertextuality is inevitable. But the extensive allusions to the *Oresteia* in the *Orestes* and, to a lesser extent, the *Electra* might suggest that more is at stake here than just an exploration of what happens when the limits of tragic intertextuality are pushed. These plays exhibit an explicit self-consciousness about their place in the tradition of Atreid myths. The *Electra* and *Orestes* are not merely new interpretations of these myths; they are variations that build on Aeschylus’ version of the myths in the *Oresteia*.

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71 On the reperformance of Aeschylus, see Biles (2006-2007) for an argument against the idea that revivals of Aeschylus would sometimes be in direct competition with new plays. For reperformance outside of Athens, see Taplin (1999). Foley (2008) 17 suggests, very attractively, that both Aeschylean revivals and Aristophanic mockery of tragedy might have led Euripides to “dabble in increasingly self-conscious allusions to earlier tragedy.”

72 The recognition scene can also be seen as a reversal of the *Choephoroe* in which the proofs are a verbal recitation of the physical proofs used by Aeschylus; see Torrance (2011) 193-4. Torrance argues (pp. 197-8) that the word *metabolē* is used throughout the Euripidean corpus to allude to his manipulations of Aeschylus’ works.

73 On the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* and Euripides’ *Hecuba*, see Thalmann (1993); Thalmann argues (p. 27) that the *parodos* was “a deeply but creatively problematical text for Euripides.”

74 Zeitlin (1980) 310.

75 Wolff (1968) 340.
Although Aristophanes could be very explicit in the *parabasis* of the *Knights* about what he thought his place was in the comic tradition, Euripides could only define his relationship with Aeschylus in a more oblique way, by alluding to and manipulating the deceased tragedian’s texts. The *Electra* and the *Orestes* are, in a way, explorations of what it means to be post-Aeschylean. That the plays’ engagement with the *Oresteia* sometimes seems critical or even mocking is natural. David Kiremidjian writes of Proust, “Parody for Proust was a form of catharsis; it was the only way he could shake off the stylistic influence of the authors he read and ensure that his own style would not be infected unconsciously.” A similar process is evident in Euripides’ *Electra* and *Orestes*: Euripides consciously invokes and then rejects the example of the *Oresteia*. The *Oresteia* was a trilogy so monolithic that any treatment of the Atreid myth after 458 almost has to be read in relation to it. The *Electra* and *Orestes* openly confront their indebtedness to the *Oresteia* through parody.

Compared to Aristophanes, Euripides was fairly restricted in the tools that he could use to reference another tragedy. But in spite of his inability to mention another tragedy or tragedian by name, his methods correspond surprisingly closely to those used in Aristophanes’ appropriation from tragedy. The intertextual tools used in tragedy and comedy turn out to be not nearly as different as one might expect, in spite of the apparent differences in tone, language, and

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76 Lazarus (2005) 5: “If Aischylos is such an influential, well-respected poet, then it makes sense for Euripides to choose him as a source for parody. By doing so, he can attempt to make fun of the established Aischylean version of a plot and lessen the weighty authority that play carries.” He points out that comic poets created a rivalry between the two, but uses it as evidence that Euripides would want to position himself against Aeschylus; it seems likely to me that the opposite was the case, and Euripides might have taken on the *Oresteia* because of an imagined rivalry that already existed in comedy, attested e.g. in Strepsiades’ and Pheidippides’ respective tragic tastes in the *Clouds*; see also Thalmann (1993) 156-8.

plot between the two genres.\textsuperscript{78} As I will show, the tools used in the \textit{Orestes} to interact with the works of a fellow tragedian – verbal reminiscences, props, famous arguments or speeches, memorable tableaux, even the manipulation of entire plots – are the same tools Aristophanes uses to mock Euripides, although Euripides’ treatment of Aeschylus should not be described as mockery. By repeating elements from other plays in a new context, Euripides uses a technique that I have already defined as parody.\textsuperscript{79} These appropriations of the \textit{Oresteia} in Euripides’ \textit{Electra} and \textit{Orestes} are analogous to Aristophanes’ attacks on Cratinus. Both constitute an attempt to negotiate one’s position in relation to an older, established playwright.

The relative chronology of these interactions, however, is unexpected. All of the extant Euripidean plays that make explicit reference to Aeschylus were produced in the last decade or so of Euripides’ career.\textsuperscript{80} By that point, Aristophanes’ tendency to mock Euripides had already existed for several years. The \textit{Electra} and \textit{Iphigeneia in Tauris} postdate the \textit{Acharnians}, and the \textit{Phoenissae} and certainly the \textit{Orestes} also postdate the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}. Euripides may even have adapted his own techniques of comic appropriation or Aristophanes’ paratragic and parodic techniques to help him explore his intertextual debt to Aeschylus in the \textit{Orestes}. It seems that the process of defining and refining what it meant to be Euripidean that was so essential to his dialogue with Aristophanes in turn helped Euripides differentiate what characterized his tragic style from that of classic tragedians such as Aeschylus.

Euripides’ \textit{Electra} alludes rather obviously to the \textit{Oresteia} in several different ways. The

\textsuperscript{78} For an extremely thorough breakdown of the differences between the two genres, see Taplin (1986). He concludes (p. 173) that tragedy and comedy were “planets in orbit around different suns.”

\textsuperscript{79} Introduction, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{80} A date between 422 and 417 for the \textit{Electra} is suggested by Cropp and Fick (1985) based on metrical evidence, although some prefer to date the play to 413. The fullest treatment is Matthiesen (1964) 66–92. Mastronarde (1994) 11–14 argues that the \textit{Phoenissae} was probably (although not definitely) performed in 411, 410, or 409.
first, and most visually apparent, is through the conspicuous re-use and manipulation of a prop. One might compare Aristophanes’ use of costumes and props from Euripides’ *Telephus* in the *Acharnians*. In both the *Choephoroe* and the *Electra*, Electra first enters the stage carrying an urn. In Aeschylus’ treatment of the myth, this urn contains libations to pour on the grave of her father Agamemnon. In Euripides’ treatment, however, Electra announces that she is carrying not libations but water, in protest of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus lowering her to the status of a slave:

> ὦ νυξ μέλαινα, χρυσέων ἀστρών τροφέ,  
> ἐν ῶ τῶδ᾽ ἄγγος τῶδ᾽ ἐφεδρεῖν κάρα,  
> φέρονα πηγὰς ποταμίως μετέρχομαι –  
> οὐ δὴ τι χρείας ἐς τοσόνδ᾽ ἀφγυμένη,  
> ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ὅβρων δεῖξομεν Διίσθουθον θεῶς –  
> γόους τ᾽ ἀφημί αἰθέρ᾽ ἐς μέγαν πατρί.  

(*Electra* 54-9)

O black night, nurse of golden stars, in which I go to the streams of the river carrying this vessel sitting on my head – not because I need to, but to show Aegisthus’ outrageous crime to the gods – and I send cries to my father out into the great sky.

Electra admits outright that she does not need to carry water to and from the stream. In fact, it is clear that she overstates her penury; later, when her farmer husband insists that her behavior is unnecessary, she claims that she is helping him because she feels she owes him a debt of gratitude for his kindness to her (67–76). Electra then exits the stage, but enters again soon after, still carrying her unnecessary urn. The urn is, self-consciously, a prop that Electra uses to better play the role of the aggrieved peasant wife. It thus becomes emblematic of what differentiates Euripides’ treatment of the myth from that of Aeschylus: Electra’s marriage and the bitterness it

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81 Taplin (1978) 77 claims that “Greek tragedians are sparing in their use of stage-properties, but this very economy throws more emphasis on their employment.”

82 On Electra’s use of her costume to manipulate the emotions of other characters, see Chapter 2, pp. 125-7.
has engendered in her.⁸³

The second, more problematic interplay with the *Choephoroe* occurs in the *Electra’s* much-maligned recognition scene (518-544). In this scene, an old man comes to Electra’s house and tells her that he has just visited Agamemnon’s grave. On the grave were signs that indicated to him that Orestes had recently visited: a lock of blond hair, a footprint, and a piece of cloth. These are precisely the signs used in the recognition scene in Aeschylus’ *Choephoroe*. But Euripides’ Electra rejects each sign, saying that a man’s hair is different from a woman’s, Orestes’ feet would be larger than hers, and she was too young to weave anything when Orestes left. Underlying Electra’s skepticism is her faith that Orestes would be too brave to visit Agamemnon’s tomb in secret; he would visit openly and not fear Aegisthus (524-5).⁸⁴ Her belief in Orestes’ courage, however, is unfounded, and the Aeschylean recognition signs turn out to be correct.⁸⁵ Finally, Orestes emerges, and the old man recognizes him from a scar on his brow that he got while hunting, a clear reminiscence of Eurykleia’s recognition of Odysseus from a hunting scar in *Odyssey* 19.⁸⁶

The very fact that the references to the *Choephoroe* in this recognition scene are so

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⁸³ Raeburn (2000) 151-4, especially p. 153: “[The urn] may also be regarded, more profoundly, as the symbol of Electra’s self-martyrdom and joy in weeping.” But cf. Michelini (1987) 181-230, especially pp. 190-2, for an argument that Electra refuses not because she wishes to emphasize her poverty, but because of her “painfully anomalous status as a virginal matron” (p. 192).

⁸⁴ This point is emphasized by Adams (1935) 120-1, Pucci (1967) 368-9, and Halporn (1983) as an attempt to rehabilitate the scene from scholars who argue for its spuriousness.

⁸⁵ Goldhill (1986) 247: “The scene does not merely mock the Aeschylean passage by treating it with an ‘improper’ attitude of liberalism or logic – a different construction of the realities of recognition – but also mocks the mocker for the false conclusions her logic induces.”

⁸⁶ Goff (1991) provides an insightful analysis of what this resonance means, arguing that while Odysseus’ story of how he got his scar proves his manhood, Orestes’ story condemns him to eternal childishness.
obvious has led some scholars to believe that the entire section should be excised. Although the current consensus leans toward the genuineness of the scene, few would claim complete confidence. All that can be said for certain is that appropriation and manipulation of Aeschylus’ work would not be entirely uncharacteristic of Euripides. As I will discuss below, Euripides’ Orestes is very explicit in its interaction with the Oresteia. It is not unreasonable to believe that he would have used a similar strategy a decade earlier. If genuine, the scene need not be a malicious or unfair attack on Aeschylus, as many have claimed. I would argue that the scene is a

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87 This argument has roots in the nineteenth century, when some scholars also doubted the genuineness of the Choephoroe scene itself, claiming that a poet as great as Aeschylus could not have written such a bad piece of drama; see Lloyd-Jones (1961). The best evidence for the genuineness of the Choephoroe recognition was its reception in Euripides, so that scene too had to be athetized. Bain (1977) argues for deletion on the basis that the text is too difficult and it would serve no purpose to introduce a lengthy digression to such an old play. Kovacs (1989) also argues vehemently for the spuriousness of this section, and his edition of the play (2002) brackets these lines. Taplin (1986) 171 “[does] not think the case against their authenticity should be lightly dismissed.”

88 Davies (1998) is a fair treatment of both sides that seems to me to exemplify the ambivalence that pervades the issue. His argument is, contra Bond (1974), that there are parallels for criticism of Aeschylus in Euripides’ works, such as the one in the Phoenissae, mentioned above, p. 51. Gallagher (2003) also argues that the passage is genuine and claims that it “would leave a gaping hole if removed” (p. 402).

89 Wright (2005) 255 seems to me to be a reasonable interpretation: “there is more to the Electra’s recognition-scene than point-scoring; it is a serious demonstration of Euripides’ awareness of his literary predecessors and the self-conscious highlighting of his own originality – meta-tragedy instead of paratragedy.”

90 On the date of the Electra, see p. 54, n. 80.

91 Hammond (1984) 380–6, who calls the recognition scene “malicious ridicule” of Aeschylus and a “side-swipe at the Choephoroe.” He suggests that Euripides was provoked by being beaten by a revival of the Oresteia, which makes the relationship between Euripides and Aeschylus seem even more like the one between Aristophanes and Cratinus, although Taplin (1999) has argued that revivals were not in direct competition with new plays; see p. 52, n. 71 above. Lloyd-Jones (1961) 180 argues that parody need not be malicious: “To later generations of readers, who regard both poets with reverence, the idea that one might poke fun at the other, and even do so at the expense of the sacred canon of dramatic unity, may seem deeply shocking. But even a small knowledge of literary history is enough to show that great writers are by no means always respectful towards their immediate predecessors. Even when they genuinely admire them, they may be stung into pointing out their defects by the invariable tendency of the literary public to prefer what is known and established to what is new and experimental.”
parody of Aeschylus. Euripides’ treatment repeats Aeschylean tropes but diverges from them in its greater emphasis on realism. Euripides’ appropriation of the Choephoroe recognition scene need not diminish Aeschylus’ stature, if such a thing were even possible. Instead, it provides Euripides with a way to explicitly confront and interrogate the influence of Aeschylus’ trilogy on his own treatment of the myth.

One of the main reasons why Electra 518-44 has so often been excised is simply that some scholars do not like it. No such deletion is possible with the Orestes; its interaction with the Oresteia is sustained throughout the entire play. It contains so many references to Aeschylus’ trilogy that excising them all would be impossible. Therefore, instead of attempting to mark references to Aeschylus in the play as spurious, many scholars have chosen instead to denigrate the quality of the play. Although the Orestes was very popular in antiquity, modern scholarship has not always been kind.

Nevertheless, in spite of the Orestes’ many purported flaws and inadequacies, it is a particularly fruitful subject for inquiry into Euripides’ allusive techniques. After all, one of the major criticisms of the play is that it is too full of references to other texts, shattering the (already

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92 See Davies (1989) 401, n. 53 for a list of scholars who use this term. Davies dismisses it as “undesirable” because most are using a definition of parody differs from my own in that it seems to include that element of malicious ridicule that Hutcheon excludes. Knox (1979) 254 calls the scene “a burlesque of Aeschylus’ recognition scene”.

93 Goff (1999-2000) identifies this realism as a main theme of the Electra as a whole.

94 Goldhill (1986) 247-50 argues that the scene is part of a larger trend in Euripides’ tragedies toward displaying an awareness of theatricality: “As Euripides forces awareness of the incongruity and arbitrariness of the Aeschylean recognition tokens, he also marks the conventionality involved in the recognition process itself. He displays the recognition of long-lost relatives as a literary, theatrical theme, a game complete with rules and conventions” (p. 249).

95 Kovacs (1989) 67 acknowledges this fact and attempts to separate these arguments from the ones that use philology to excise the passage, saying, “Some features of the passage… may be part of the reason we might wish it were by someone else, but they cannot furnish a reason to believe that it is and may even furnish a reason for believing in its genuineness.”

96 Greenberg (1962) 157-8 has a summary of earlier unfavorable critical opinions.
fragile) tragic illusion. Zeitlin’s famous statement that “it is perhaps the first work of literature in which close sustained familiarity with other texts is imperative for any genuine appreciation of its meaning and achievement”\textsuperscript{97} has been contested on multiple grounds; arguably the \textit{Orestes} might still be enjoyable without knowledge of the \textit{Oresteia}, and other texts, especially parodic works such as Aristophanes’ \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} or the pseudo-Homeric \textit{Margites}, seem to engage just as extensively and explicitly with other texts as the \textit{Orestes} does.\textsuperscript{98} But few would take issue with her description of the \textit{Orestes} as a ‘palimpsestic text’ with allusions within allusions, where one line or scene can refer to multiple texts simultaneously without easy one-to-one correspondence.\textsuperscript{99}

The \textit{Orestes}’ engagement with the \textit{Oresteia} is the most sustained, prominent intertext of the play, befitting the \textit{Oresteia}’s status as an especially esteemed trilogy.\textsuperscript{100} But Euripides incorporated elements of other tragedies into the \textit{Orestes} too, including both his own works\textsuperscript{101}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} Zeitlin (1980) 312.
\item \textsuperscript{98} This is the objection particularly of Wright (2006a) 46. Wright claims that Zeitlin “overstates the case, as if allusion and intertextuality had never existed before 408.” Although Wright’s objection is understandable, he seems to me to misrepresent Zeitlin’s point: she is not arguing that the \textit{Orestes} invented intertextuality, but that it was the first text where understanding the references was crucial to comprehension and enjoyment.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Zeitlin (1980) 314.
\item \textsuperscript{100} This is the analysis of Zeitlin (1980) 312, who also claims that the \textit{Oresteia} “[exemplified] Athenian ideology of fifty years previous”.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Orestes’ onstage madness connects him to Euripides’ \textit{Heracles}. Orestes shares even more similarities with Heracles’ son Telephus: in an iconic scene in Euripides’ \textit{Telephus}, the title character took the baby Orestes hostage and held a knife to his throat. Orestes seems to be replaying this traumatic scene from his childhood, and from earlier in Euripides’ career, when he holds Hermione hostage in the same way: Zeitlin (1980) 339 connects these two scenes as well, as does Perrotta (1928) 132-5. See also below, p. 66-7. The final tableau of Orestes holding Hermione hostage on the roof of the \textit{skêne} also recalls another famous figure who appeared on high, Euripides’ Medea. There are a surprising number of correspondences between her and Orestes, including their mutual desire to exact revenge by killing the wife and children of their intended targets, Jason and Menelaus respectively; see Zeitlin (1980) 325-6.
\end{itemize}
and those of Sophocles. In addition to all of these allusions to specific tragedies, Wolff argues that the play is full of other mythical names and references, lending this almost entirely novel plot a traditional tragic aura. But the Orestes does not limit itself to intertextuality within its own genre. The Odyssey is also present, as is Stesichorus’ lyric Oresteia. Finally, various parts of the play have also been identified as having a comic or even Aristophanic tone. The extreme allusiveness of the Orestes, along with its seemingly self-conscious awareness of its own intertextuality, has led scholars to embrace interpretations of the Orestes as a tragedy that is

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102 The bow that Orestes uses to ward off the Furies and temporarily cure his illness seems to be a reference to the similar bow prop in Sophocles’ Philoctetes, produced just one year previous in 409, although there is some dispute over whether the bow in the Orestes is indeed a prop; see Greenberg (1962) 163-7, Zeitlin (1980) 314-6. For the extensive similarities between both Orestes and Neoptolemus as young men with no father figure and Orestes and Philoctetes as ill cast-outs, see Falkner (1983) 290-4. Additionally, Orestes’ descent into pointless murder and terror contrasts with the positive education of Neoptolemus in that play, and the explicit negation at the end of the Orestes of the tradition in which Neoptolemus and Hermione marry (1653) could be seen as some kind of variation on the myth as it is presented in either the Philoctetes or Euripides’ own Andromache, a play that centers around Neoptolemus’ conspicuous absence; see Falkner (1983) 299. On the Andromache, see Mossman (1996), who argues that the absence of Neoptolemus is the unifying force behind the play, as well as de Jong (1990) 377-82.

103 Wolff (1968) 342.

104 Orestes draws an explicit comparison between himself and Telemachus (588-90), reversing the Odyssey’s trope of using Orestes’ murder of Aegisthus as an exemplum for how Telemachus should deal with Penelope’s suitors; see Zeitlin (1980) 323-5, although it is worth mentioning that the story about Orestes told in the Odyssey is significantly expurgated when compared to tragedy; for instance, there is no mention of the matricide. I am not certain whether the subtleties of this reference would have been lost on the audience.

105 Especially Helen’s entrance (71) and the scene with the Phrygian (1366-1536). On the humor of Helen’s entrance, see Dunn (1989) 241, who takes the least charitable view towards Helen, calling her “outrageously tactless” and saying that she “cheerfully asks how the old maid and the murderer are doing.” More generally, Dunn argues that the play maintains a tragicomic tone by combining a comic willingness to speak freely with a tragic understanding that doing so will have negative consequences, which in comedy it rarely does. Burnett (1971) 218 calls the scene between Orestes and the Phrygian “an almost Aristophanic use of standard comic tricks,” comparing him to the Scythian Archer in the Thesmophoriazusae. On the Phrygian, see Porter (1994) 173-214 and Wright (2008). Segal (1995) 54 argues that the arranged marriages at the end of the Orestes are comic; while this might be an anachronistic interpretation based on Shakespeare, it is one possible explanation for the scholiast’s description of the ending as ‘rather comic’; see below, pp. 66-7. Menelaus describes Orestes’ plan as γέλως (1560), but as I argued in the introduction, γέλως often meant ‘absurd’ rather than ‘funny’, which makes sense considering that holding Hermione at knifepoint is hardly amusing.
“ironic, decadent, ‘modern’, even ‘postmodern.’” Zeitlin argues that the Orestes represents the culmination of “a tradition that has reached the end of its organic development.” Furthermore, the characters within the play seem unusually aware of the play’s intertexts: Zeitlin calls them “erudite” and Matthew Wright describes the play as engaging in “metamythology”, a phenomenon that occurs when characters seem to have knowledge of other, alternate versions of their own myths.

The approach of the Orestes to its own indebtedness to the Oresteia differs greatly from that of the Electra. The recognition scene in the Electra seems almost burdened by the Choephoroe in its implicit acknowledgment that any recognition between Electra and Orestes will inevitably be compared to Aeschylus’ original. Aeschylus’ proofs must be rejected before Euripides’ characters can find their way, and even then, they still turn out to be accurate. In the Orestes, however, the legacy of the Oresteia is not a burden but an opportunity: the entire action of the play takes place in the interim period between the Choephoroe and the Eumenides. The play begins with Orestes hounded by Furies and ends with Apollo instructing him to go to Athens to be purified. The events of the Orestes, therefore, have little impact on the final outcome, which

106 Zeitlin (1980) 310. Not everybody has embraced this modernist approach, of course; for more traditional philological approaches, consider Greenberg (1962) 168-80 arguing that the central conflict in the Orestes is between the contradictory values of philia and sophia. Similarly, Boulter (1962) 103-6 traces the use of the word agria from its use to describe Orestes’ illness until it shifts to describe his character, and Parry (1969) argues that the ultimate goal of Orestes and Electra is sotēria; see also Myrick (1993-4) 132 on how chariot-racing imagery is used in Atreid plays to gesture toward the difficulty of achieving a satisfactory telos and Said (1993) on Argos as an alternative to Thebes for the classic tragic space.


108 Zeitlin (1980) 312: “No other characters in a Greek drama are so bookish, so learned, although they themselves are marvelously unaware of their erudition.”

109 Wright (2006a) 39-40 points out that this phenomenon is especially marked when characters talk about what other people say about them, much like the so-called ‘Alexandrian footnote’.
has already been predetermined by the *Oresteia*; Euripides’ play is merely an interlude.\(^\text{110}\) The fact that the conclusion of the plot is preordained – although the audience would not have realized that the *Orestes* was a prequel to the *Eumenides* until the *deus ex machina* ending – gives Euripides the freedom to explore in greater depth than might have otherwise been possible the characters’ emotional responses in the aftermath of the murder of Clytemnestra. Nowhere in Aeschylus, or even in Sophocles, are the consequences of that murder investigated so thoroughly, from the disapprobation of the townspeople to the petty vengefulness of Tyndareus to, most poignantly, the psychological consequences for Orestes himself.\(^\text{111}\)

The *Orestes* begins with a reversal of an early scene from the *Eumenides*: instead of Clytemnestra attempting to rouse the sleeping chorus of Furies, Electra stands watch over her sleeping brother Orestes and even attempts to keep the chorus from waking him (136-7).\(^\text{112}\) But Euripides’ Electra and Orestes are in a far worse situation than Aeschylus’ Atreid siblings, since the latter have Apollo as an ally. Apollo does not appear in the *Orestes* until the very end as a *deus ex machina* to break the impasse between Orestes and Menelaus and announce that Orestes must move on to Athens so that the events of the *Eumenides* can finally play out (1648-52). For most of

\(^\text{110}\) Aelion (1983) 152-3 addresses the placement of the *Orestes* in the *Oresteia* myth; for her general comparison of Euripides’ and Aeschylus’ treatments of the aftermath of the matricide, see pp. 152-61.

\(^\text{111}\) Delving into the motivations of the characters has not, however, always led to what critics would consider a sympathetic result. Some argue that all of the characters in the play are despicable; Boulter (1962) 102 traces the expansion of this idea, from its beginnings in *Poetics* 1454a28-9, through to Aristophanes of Byzantium’s slightly puzzling assertion that only Pylades is sympathetic. Those who would defend the quality of the *Orestes* against its many detractors respond that the characters are flawed but complex and therefore interesting; Boulter (1962) 103-6 goes through Orestes’ psychological development from victim to victimizer and hunter to hunted. Greenberg (1962) 157-60 argues that we should not look for consistency of character and that Euripides does not unproblematically label any character as good or bad. For individual characters, see Synodinou (1988) on Electra, Nisetich (1986) on Pylades, Wolff (1968) 343-7 on Orestes, and Wright (2006a) 43-6 on Helen. On the other hand, in addition to being difficult to sympathize with, the characters are ineffective at accomplishing anything they set out to do, as Burnett (1971) 184 argues: “Only the *Orestes* makes outright failure its subject, imitating it with a series of actions that one after another go astray or simply disintegrate.”

\(^\text{112}\) Zeitlin (1980) 316.
the play, the best savior Euripides’ characters can hope for is the snivelling Menelaus. Without
the god to ward off the Furies, Orestes suffers through an attack of madness (253-79).113

One of the tools Aristophanes uses to parody Euripides is the duplication of a speech, but
put into the mouth of a different character with very different results. In the Thesmophoriazusae,
Euripides and Mnesilochus are utterly ineffective at playing the roles of Menelaus and Helen
from Euripides’ Helen or Perseus and Andromeda from Euripides’ Andromeda.114 Similarly, in
the Orestes, Orestes tries to make up for the lack of Apollo by playing his role and making the
god’s arguments on his own behalf.115 When Tyndareus asserts that Orestes should have brought
a lawsuit against Clytemnestra instead of committing matricide (500-3) – an anachronistic
argument that treats the ending of the Eumenides, with its move from private to public justice, as
something that has already taken place116 – Orestes responds by paraphrasing Apollo’s claim in
the Eumenides about the lack of importance of the mother:

πατὴρ μὲν ἐφύτευσέν με, σῇ δ᾽ ἠτυχε παῖς,
τὸ σπέρμα ἄρουρα παραλαβὼν ἄλλου πάρα·
[ἀνευ δὲ πατρός τέκνον ὡς εἰγ ἐν τοῖν ἀν.
ἐλογισάμην οὖν τῷ γένους ἀρχηγέτῃ
μάλλων μ’ ἀμώναι τῆς ὑποστάσης τροφάς.]

(Orestes 552-6)

My father sired me, but your child merely gave birth to me, the

113 There have been many interesting studies of madness and illness in this play. Hartigan (1987) 129-32
argues that the madness in the Orestes is externally caused, like the madness in the Heracles, and denies
the possibility of a sane resolution, although others have emphasized Orestes’ synesis of his guilt, such as
Wolff (1968) 343. Hartigan also points out that the name of Helen seems to cause Orestes’ bout of
madness, which would seem to suggest that her name has some kind of curse-like power, as it does in the
parodos of the Agamemnon. On Orestes’ symptoms, see Theodorou (1993) 35-44, a study that is very
sensitive about the connection between Orestes’ madness and his feelings of guilt, and Smith (1967).
114 For a more extensive analysis of these parodies, see Chapter 4, pp. 243-54.
116 Wolff (1968) 351 astutely points out that aside from the obvious anachronism, it would have also been
impossible to invoke the laws against the reigning queen, and anyway, Orestes was little more than a baby
at the time and could not have possibly enacted the scenario Tyndareus suggests here.
field that received the seed from another; without a father no child
would ever be born. So I thought it right to support the author of
my existence rather than my nurse.

This argument is a clear reminiscence of Apollo’s argument in Aeschylus’ version (Eumenides 657-66). But from the mouth of a mortal man rather than a god, and without Athena to lend further divine support, Orestes seems to be engaging in special pleading, and Tyndareus and Menelaus are unconvinced. Apollo’s argument becomes unconvincing, even offensive to other characters when made by Orestes himself. He is equally unsuccessful when he makes a reductio ad absurdum claim both to Tyndareus (564-71) and later in the assembly (931-42) about what would happen if women were allowed to kill their husbands without being punished that seems to be a revised version of one of the arguments used by the Furies (Eumenides 499-507).117

Euripides’ Orestes is a parody of those divine speeches in Aeschylus; the words and arguments are similar, but far less effective and convincing when spoken by a human.

But Apollo’s absence leaves an even greater pall over the play. In the Eumenides, his unwavering support of the murder of Clytemnestra lends legitimacy to Orestes’ act. But the only defender Orestes has in the Orestes is a nameless farmer who speaks on his behalf in the assembly but finds little agreement (916-30). The lack of divine support not only leaves Orestes and Electra open to vilification and abuse from others, but also seems to foster their own doubts about the rightness of their actions. In an attempt to convince themselves that they have justice on their side, the characters plot another, even less defensible murder. But while Orestes, Pylades, and Electra treat their planned murder of Helen as a second murder of Clytemnestra, calling on Agamemnon’s help for their new scheme is far less appropriate than it was in the Choephoroe,

especially in light of Orestes’ assertion earlier in the play that he believes that had Agamemnon been alive he would have begged Orestes not to commit the matricide (288-93). Furthermore, although Helen and Clytemnestra share superficial similarities, the Helen of the Orestes hardly seems like a woman who would allow herself to get drenched in her murdered husband’s blood.\footnote{Burnett (1971) 199-200. See also Wolff (1968) 340, and Wright (2006a) argues that the Orestes as a whole is a sort of intellectual sequel to the Helen.} The influence of the Choephoroe is also present in Helen’s initial trip to bring offerings to Clytemnestra’s grave (71-125), in the oddly chatty Pylades who participates in the planning but at a crucial moment in the final scene \textit{φησὶν σωπῶν} (1592),\footnote{Nisetich (1986) 48-54 argues that silence would have been expected from Pylades, and his “garrulity” both here and in the \textit{IT} is “tragicomic”. See also Burnett (1971) 214: “The old Pylades spoke with the voice of god, but this one uses the accents of that tragic bad counselor who is so often a slave.” Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1969) 52, who argues that line 1592 is meant to gesture toward the arbitrary nature of the three-actor rule, although these interpretations need not be mutually exclusive; when Orestes spoke in the Choephoroe, it was in violation of this very tragic convention, so Euripides is refusing here to duplicate Aeschylus’ flouting of the rules using the very same character.} and in the mini-\textit{kommos} to Agamemnon sung by Electra, Orestes, and Pylades before they attempt to kill Helen (1226-39).

In addition to the reminiscences of the Choephoroe and Eumenides, there are also references to the Agamemnon in the Orestes. These are fewer in number, since the Orestes explicitly positions itself between the two latter plays in the trilogy. However, there are some echoes, such as the Phrygian slave’s lament of \textit{αἴλινον ἀἴλινον} (1395), a ritual formula that in this context might recall for the audience the \textit{parodos} of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon.\footnote{The evidence for general knowledge of songs from tragedy is not without its problems, but taken as a whole it is suggestive. Although I find it difficult to believe that the audience of the Frogs truly had the complete works of Aeschylus and Euripides with them, as the chorus suggests (1110-8), the reference in the \textit{parabasis} of the Knights to people singing Cratinus’ songs in symposia seems suggestive, as does the (admittedly late) testimonium from Plutarch’s Nicias 29.3 about the Athenian slaves in Sicilian mines singing Euripidean choral odes.} This clear verbal reminiscence calls to mind another technique common in Aristophanes’ appropriation from tragedy: he uses Euripides’ famous line \textit{ἡ γλῶσσ’ ὁμώμοχ’, ἡ δὲ φρὴν ἀνώμοτος} (Hippolytus 612).
three times in his extant plays, once in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (275-6) and twice in the *Frogs* (101-2 and 1471). Electra also tells Hermione that she and her brother have yielded ‘to the yoke of necessity’ (ἀνάγκης δ᾽ ἐς ζυγὸν, 1330), just as Agamemnon did when he agreed to sacrifice Iphigeneia (ἀνάγκας... λέπαδνον, *Agamemnon* 218). This echo is particularly appropriate because Hermione later becomes a doublet of Iphigeneia, Orestes’ new sacrifice to the gods that mimics Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his daughter so many years earlier that set off the entire chain of events leading to his being murdered by Clytemnestra. When Orestes fails to kill Helen, he intends to sacrifice Hermione until Apollo arrives *ex machina* to stop him.

To a reader of the play, it is clear that the *Orestes* is meant as an interlude between the *Choephoroe* and the *Eumenides* because of what Apollo tells Orestes in his last speech:

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ἐνθένδε δ᾽ ἐλθὼν τὴν Ἀθηναίων πόλιν
dικὴν ὑπὸσχὺς αἵματος μητροκτόνου
Εὐμενίδες τρισσαῖς· θεοὶ δὲ σοι δίκης βραβῆς
πάγοιν ἐν Ἀρείοισι εὐσεβεστάτην
ψῆφον διοίσου᾽, ἐνθα νικήσαι σε χρή.
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*(Orestes* 1648-52)

From there go to Athens and be brought to trial by the three Eumenides for the murder of your mother; the gods will be the judges of your trial on the Areopagus and will take a very righteous vote, and there you will be acquitted.

It is obvious that Apollo is referring to the events of the *Eumenides* here. But in performance, until Apollo’s arrival, the audience would not yet have known that the multitude of Aeschylean references throughout the *Orestes* would culminate in this conclusion. Instead, they would have

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121 The quote in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the first one in the *Frogs* are actually paraphrases instead of direct quotations, while the second time the line is used in the *Frogs* Aristophanes duplicates the first half of Euripides’ line exactly. However, it should be noted that Hippolytus does end up keeping his oath in spite of this declaration, as does Euripides in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, while Dionysus in the *Frogs* uses the *Hippolytus* line to justify going back on his word.
seen a very striking tableau: Orestes holding a knife to Hermione’s neck, threatening to slit her throat while her father Menelaus looks on. This scene is not directly parallel to any in the Oresteia, but instead seems to echo the similar Euripidean scene in the Telephus (438 BCE) where Telephus holds the infant Orestes hostage in order to compel Agamemnon’s aid. Aristophanes had already parodied the very same scene twice. The audience in 408 would have been more likely to remember the scene from the Aristophanic parodies in the Acharnians (425 BCE) and the Thesmophoriazusae (411 BCE) than they would be to remember the original Euripidean play produced 30 years earlier. Although it is hard to know how to interpret the cryptic statement in the hypothesis of the Orestes that τὸ δρᾶμα κωμικωτέραν ἕχει τὴν καταστροφήν (the play has a rather comic conclusion), one possibility is that the final scene of the play seems so similar to Aristophanes’ earlier parodies of the Telephus that the ending of the Orestes becomes almost a Euripidean self-parody. This conspicuous reincorporation of tendencies and scenes that Aristophanes had mocked him for is a characteristic Euripidean response to Aristophanes’ parodies.

Apollo’s speech at the conclusion of the play clarifies the relation of the Orestes to the Oresteia: unlike the Electra, which seems to try to ‘correct’ the Choephoroe’s recognition scene, the Orestes complements the Oresteia, expanding and elaborating on it without in any way replacing it. But immediately before that conclusion, Euripides very conspicuously mimics a

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122 Except, perhaps, for the description of Iphigeneia’s sacrifice in the parodos of the Agamemnon. However, surely the repetition of a striking visual tableau would have been more noticeable to the audience than the acting out of a choral lyric.

123 Another example of this technique of repetition of a striking visual tableau would be Trygaeus rising to heaven on the back of a dung-beetle in the Peace in parody of Euripides’ Bellerophon.

124 In fact, the Telephus seems to have become almost a shorthand for Aristophanes’ habit of mocking Euripides; it is not only extensively parodied in two extant plays, it is also mentioned or alluded to in several others, including the Clouds, Peace, Frogs. See also Chapter 4, p. 232, n. 70.
scene for which Aristophanes’ parodic treatments had become inextricable from the Euripidean original. If the *Orestes* represents Euripides’ attempt to create a Euripidean treatment of the Atreid myth in a post-Aeschylean environment, then it is extremely striking that he chose to end the play in this way, by subtly acknowledging that part of what it meant to be Euripidean was to be mocked by Aristophanes.

III. “Athens’ grave illness needs a cure greater than trugedy” (*Wasps* 650-1)

As I have argued, the techniques that Euripides uses to allude to and manipulate the *Oresteia* are similar to those used by Aristophanes to appropriate from tragedy, including quotation, the borrowing of props, transposition of famous arguments or speeches into new and perhaps inappropriate settings, and the repetition of memorable tableaux. Whether the appropriating playwright is a comedian or a tragedian, the methods used to borrow from tragedy differ primarily in the degree of subtlety. In spite of the differences between the two genres, there are striking similarities in the techniques used for intertextual interaction. The same is true of comic intertextual techniques: Aristophanes engages in paratragedy and tragic parody, but he also crafts a persona for Euripides so that he can treat him as he would a rival comedian. Euripides’ responses to Aristophanes’ mocking portrayals of his work are often similar to those of a comedian; like Cratinus, although in a less explicit manner, he embraces and revalorizes the idiosyncratic tendencies that Aristophanes had mocked him for. Additionally, Euripides uses techniques similar to Aristophanes’ in order to recall and reshape earlier tragedies, including not only those of Aeschylus, but also Euripides’ own earlier works.

Tragedies were not in direct competition with comedies in the dramatic contests, and the two genres have many significant differences in form and content. It would be natural, therefore,
to expect that Aristophanes would use different methods to mock tragedians than fellow comedians. Surprisingly, Aristophanes seems to have used similar tools to define his position against tragedians such as Agathon, Aeschylus, and Euripides as he did against his direct competitors Cratinus and Eupolis. Although it may have been a relatively routine matter for comedians to activate and manipulate the personas that other comedians were already using to describe themselves and their comic brands, Aristophanes had to implement a few changes in his strategy when dealing with tragedy. But these alterations were slight. Tragedians did not create personas for themselves, but Aristophanes had no difficulty doing it for them.

When Aristophanes put a tragedian onstage, as he so often did, he tended to characterize that tragedian as a physical embodiment of his poetics. This phenomenon is apparent in two places. In the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis observes a correspondence between Euripides’ appearance and his tragic style:

\[
\text{ἀναβάδην ποιεῖς,}
\text{ἐξὸν καταβάδην; οὐκ ἔτος χωλοὺς ποιεῖς.}
\text{ἄτὰρ τί τὰ ράκι ἐκ τραγῳδίας ἔχεις.}
\text{ἔσθητ᾽ ἐλεινήν; οὐκ ἔτος πτωχοὺς ποιεῖς.}
\]

*(Acharnians 410-3)*

You write with your feet propped up when you could stand? It’s no wonder you write cripples. And why do you wear this pitiable garb, the rags from a tragedy? No wonder you write beggars.

Dicaeopolis, having seen Euripides with his own eyes, feels that he now has insight into some of Euripides’ poetic choices. A similar interaction occurs with the characterization of Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae*: Agathon is depicted as overly feminine because of the delicacy and beauty of his poetry.\(^{125}\) There are obvious similarities between this technique and insulting

\(^{125}\) See Chapter 4, pp. 203-5.
Cratinus for being a drunk or Eupolis for being a pederast, since both use as the object of mockery a persona who is a distillation of the dramatist’s poetics. The only difference is that Aristophanes had to create these personas for his tragedian targets, while his comic competitors played a role in constructing the personas themselves. Like a comedian’s persona, Aristophanes’ tragic personas were unstable and flexible; the Euripides in the Frogs is not necessarily meant to be understood as the same character as the Euripides in the Thesmophoriazusae or the Acharnians. Any ‘Euripides’ character in Aristophanic comedy functions primarily as the personification of his tragedies.

In all of these struggles, the playwright’s persona and his poetics were conflated. As I have shown, instead of targeting the work or style of another comedian or a tragedian directly, Aristophanes and his competitors attacked personas. Just as the Cratinus who is a character in the Pytinē – and, for that matter, the Cratinus called out by name in the Knights – may have shared little with Cratinus the man, the Euripides who appeared in Aristophanes’ comedies likely bore little similarity to the real-life Euripides. But the persona was still a useful intermediary whom Aristophanes’ characters could abuse relentlessly even though, less obviously, Euripides’ plays profoundly influenced Aristophanic comedy.

In addition to creating easily mockable poetic personas for his tragic targets, Aristophanes also adapted the other techniques he had used against comedians. Brief offhand insults could work equally well against both genres. Instead of deriding the audience for preferring his competitors’ comedies, Aristophanes often has his characters profess their favorite tragedian, as Strepsiades and Pheidippides do in the Clouds, and then uses that preference as a barometer of the characters’ foolishness (Clouds 1363-72). In Aristophanes’ plays, being the sort of person who prefers Euripides to Aeschylus is to be highly indicative of character, and rarely in
a positive way. This choice is perhaps an unusual one, since Aristophanes’ own extensive appropriation of Euripides’ texts suggests a certain level of respect for the tragedian and appreciation of his skill. But the ‘Euripides’ who appears onstage in Aristophanes’ plays and who is a favorite of Pheidippides is an extremely distorted version, while Aristophanes’ incorporation of Euripidean texts often reveals a more nuanced appreciation of the tragedian’s work. The division between Euripides and ‘Euripides’ gradually increases throughout the dialogue between the two playwrights; in the Frogs, the characterization of Euripides is as a pastiche of all of the idiosyncratic tendencies that Aristophanes had mocked him for.

Finally, much as Cratinus’ adaptation of Aristophanes’ insults was the basis of the Pytinē, Aristophanes could incorporate scenes, costumes, lines, or even entire plots of tragedies into his comedies and make them his own. The Thesmophoriazusae is the most obvious example of this technique, with its extended parodies of Euripides’ Telephus, Helen, and Andromeda. Although Aristophanes’ interaction with Euripides differed in many ways from his relationships with his comic competitors, the mechanisms he used were similar in both cases. Additionally, Aristophanes used a technique that was apparently not often utilized between comedians: the parodying of specific Euripidean lines, scenes, or even whole plays. These two categories are distinct but have the ability to overlap, as when ‘Euripides’ in the Thesmophoriazusae acts out his own plays to attempt to rescue Mnesilochus.

Aristophanes’ frequent habit of alluding to and parodying tragedy was a calculated risk. On the one hand, any act of allusion creates a sort of intellectual intimacy (or at least the illusion thereof) between the author and the audience; when an audience member ‘decodes’ a reference, it

126 Such as, for example, Aristophanes’ lost Phoenissae and Lemniae.
increases his enjoyment of the play.\textsuperscript{127} In his \textit{parabases}, Aristophanes frequently flatters the audience and tells them how clever they are, a self-serving strategy that is meant to curry their favor.\textsuperscript{128} Scattering allusions throughout his plays has a similar effect, as long as his audience realizes the allusions are there. But just as the successful decoding of an allusion can create a connection between the viewer and the author, failure to decode can lead to alienation.\textsuperscript{129} While attempting to connect to the audience by transmuting another playwright’s texts, Aristophanes ran the risk of seeming derivative and elitist rather than clever and accessible. If an audience member realizes that an allusion is being made but is unfamiliar with the target text, he may feel left out of the joke and his enjoyment of the play may decrease. When Aristophanes fills a comedy with quotations from Euripides, less educated audience members might feel that they are not part of the target audience.

However, although Aristophanes’ comic rivals attempted to capitalize on this risk by portraying him as an over-intellectualizing sophist, Aristophanes’ frequent appropriation of Euripides’ tragedies seems to have been well-received by his audience. In response to his defeat by Cratinus’ \textit{Pytinē}, in the Lenaia of 422 Aristophanes produced two comedies that competed against each other directly, the \textit{Wasps} and the \textit{Proagōn}.\textsuperscript{130} The former is a more explicitly political return to the mockery of Cleon that was so successful in the \textit{Knights}, while the latter featured an

\textsuperscript{127} Hutcheon (1985) 32, Revermann (2006b) 103.
\textsuperscript{128} Although he is equally likely to insult the audience’s poor taste. See Revermann (2006b) 101-2 on this complicated phenomenon: Revermann argues that while flattering the audience is obviously a self-serving act, audience ‘vilification’ is a remnant of comedy’s iambographic roots.
\textsuperscript{129} Hutcheon (1985) 101. However, see Revermann (2006b) 104-13 for an argument that a large portion of the Athenian citizen body would have participated in a chorus at some point, which would mean that the audience of tragedy and comedy would have a relatively high level of competence. Cf. Schlesinger (1937) 305, who writes, “It seems likely... that to a large extent Aristophanes used parody for his own amusement without attempting always to get it across to his public.”
\textsuperscript{130} On this extremely strange occurrence, see Storey (2003b). Storey argues that it was crucially important to understand the \textit{Wasps} and \textit{Proagōn} as complementary to each other.
extensive parody of Euripides and the tragic proágôn.131 The fact that these two competing comedies were meant to be seen as negative images of each other is suggested by the fact that, in the prologue of the Wasps, the slave Xanthias explicitly tells the audience that, for once, Aristophanes is not going to mock Euripides in this play (οὐδ᾽ αὖθις ἀνασελγαινόμενος Εὐριπίδης; nor is Euripides complained about again, Wasps 61). The defeat of the Wasps by the Proágôn might suggest that not only had the audience come to expect that Aristophanes would mock Euripides in many of his plays, but they had come to enjoy it as well. The audience’s enjoyment was a positive outcome for Aristophanes, and he did emerge victorious that year. But it also meant that as a result of his parodies, his work and Euripides’ had become to some degree inextricable.132

Since Euripides was not a comedian, acknowledging and subverting Aristophanes’ mockery was not compulsory as it was for Cratinus and Eupolis. However, as I have argued, it is hardly surprising that Aristophanes’ frequent targeting did elicit a reaction; Euripides often took advantage of Aristophanes’ singling out of characteristically Euripidean tendencies to build a recognizable style. On a practical level, these responses are more difficult to identify than those of comedians. In his dialogue with Aristophanes, Euripides did not have access to the same methods that Cratinus used for recapturing his own persona. He could not, for instance, simply create a tragedy in which Tragedy was attempting to divorce her husband Euripides, a man who dressed in rags and had a vegetable seller for a mother, because of his crimes against women. But in spite of his inability to use such straightforward tactics, Euripides still had many of the allusive

131 This is the usual reading of Σ Wasps 61c = Proágôn test. iv: οὐ μόνον ἐν τούτῳ δράματι, ὡς εἶχεται, εἰσῆκται οὕτως Εὐριπίδης, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ Προαγώνι καὶ ἐν τοῖς Ἀχαρνέωσι.
132 The Thesmophoriazusae may be profitably viewed as a reflection on this convergence; see Chapter 4, pp. 230-3.
tools of comedy at his disposal.

Although far less direct, Euripides’ strategy is most similar to the (apparently very influential) one used by Cratinus in the Pytinē. As I will explore further in later chapters, when Aristophanes mocked Euripides in the Acharnians for frequently staging ragged beggar-kings, Euripides responded in the Helen by retaking control over the topos through the creation of Menelaus, a king who uses his rags as cleverly as Aristophanes’ Dicaeopolis. And when Aristophanes claimed in the Thesmophoriazusae that Euripides had a tendency to choose plays with heroines who are shameless instead of sōphrōn, Euripides responded by creating the Bacchae, a play that explores the impossibility of unproblematic female sōphrosynē in consideration of the conflicting pressures that women face. Just as Cratinus detoxified Aristophanes’ insults by embracing his drunken persona, Euripides confronts and recaptures the very tendencies Aristophanes had mocked him for.

In light of the manifold similarities in textual appropriation between comedies, between tragedies, and across generic boundaries, it would not have been difficult for Aristophanes and Euripides to create a dramatic dialogue. Frequently, as I will show in later chapters, this dialogue took the form of responsive variations on the same themes that build upon and expand the other playwright’s earlier variations. Because Euripides and Aristophanes were approaching the same themes from different genres, however, they were able to avoid some of the potential pitfalls of intrageneric interactions. Any kind of textual appropriation is necessarily a failure to be completely original; it is for this reason that parody especially has often been seen as parasitic on
the target text, both in content and in prestige.\textsuperscript{133} When Aristophanes mocks Cratinus in the
Knights for not having had a victory in so long that his wreaths have dried up, he positions
himself as superior to a very successful older poet. The same can be said about Euripides’
appropriation of Aeschylus’ Oresteia in the Electra, which seems to ‘correct’ weaknesses in the
recognition scene of the Choephoroe. Whether or not these parodies actually decrease the
prestige of the target text is an open question, since, as I have already argued, parody and other
forms of appropriation necessarily acknowledge the value of the target text; as Thomas Greene
writes, “Every creative imitation mingles filial rejection with respect.”\textsuperscript{134} However, it remains a
fact that an appropriating text is always, in a certain sense, ‘secondary’ to its target.\textsuperscript{135} In a genre
that values originality and uniqueness, as Old Comedy claims to, an author who frequently
appropriates other texts is vulnerable to being called unimaginative and (even worse) derivative.

One of the advantages of intergeneric parody is that such appropriation, although still
especially derivative in nature, nevertheless has the benefit of bringing something new to one’s
genre. I believe that the intertextual relationship between Euripides and Aristophanes was one of
symbiosis, not parasitism. This opinion is not universally held; many scholars assume that

\textsuperscript{133} Kiremidjian (1969) 232 sums this viewpoint up nicely: “The parodist is seen as some sort of scrofular,
scurrilous second-rater who failed to make the grade himself and now indulges his spleen by jeering,
mocking, and ridiculing his helpless subject.” Hutcheon (1985) xiv agrees: “Like irony, parody is a form if
indirect as well as double-voiced discourse, but it is not parasitic in any way. In transmuting or
remodelling previous texts, it points to the differential but mutual dependence of parody and parodied
texts. Its two voices neither merge nor cancel each other out; they work together, while remaining distinct
in their defining difference.” But as the intensity of the language in both of these quotes might suggest, the
idea that parody was parasitic used to be very widely held.

\textsuperscript{134} Greene (1982) 46.

\textsuperscript{135} Stated eloquently by Bloom (1973) 80, with original emphasis: “Conceptually the central problem for
the latecomer necessarily is repetition, for repetition dialectically raised to re-creation is the ephebe’s road
of excess, leading away from the horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica.” Silk (2013) goes
further and calls comedy a ‘junior genre’; “On any reckoning, fifth-century comedy is far more influenced
by fifth-century tragedy than vice versa. Conversely, any influence of comedy on (for instance) Euripides
is a perfect example of this principle in action: Euripides ‘renews’ his genre by drawing on elements of the
‘junior’ genre of comedy...”
paratragedy not only elevates comedy but also lowers tragedy. Martin Revermann draws the following distinction between the effect of paratragedy and the effect of paraepic on the appropriated text:

While paratragedy is an especially aggressive version of comedy’s parasitic way of generic appropriation in general, the paraepic mode, albeit still parasitic in nature, seeks not to devalue the object of appropriation and, in a zero-sum game situation, profit from its alleged failures and deficiencies (as is the case with paratragedy). On the contrary: paraepic comedy aggrandizes even further the already high status of the appropriated genre and strives to feed off the cultural prestige of epic poetry, thereby leaning more towards a scenario which economists and game theorists call ‘Pareto optimal’. Here none of the participants is worse off and at least one of them is in fact better off than before.\(^{136}\)

But Revermann offers no evidence to support his claim that paratragedy creates a “zero-sum game situation”. Certainly, Aristophanes’ comedies benefit from borrowing some of tragedy’s prestige; when Dicaeopolis says in the \textit{Acharnians} \textit{τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῳδία} (tragedy also knows what is just, \textit{Acharnians 500}), Aristophanes is clearly attempting to appropriate for his own genre some of tragedy’s accepted status as a literary form that could teach meaningful lessons.\(^{137}\) Tragedy also deals in topics that are more serious than comedy, so Aristophanes’ characters might use tragic diction and quotation at moments when they are experiencing – or pretending to experience – deep emotion. The use of tragic vocabulary effectively changes the emotional register of the scene.\(^{138}\)

However, it is unclear that Euripides suffered any loss in status or prestige on account of

\(^{136}\) Revermann (2013) 105-6.  
\(^{137}\) Taplin (1983) 331-2.  
\(^{138}\) Wright (2013) 214-5.
being a frequent target of Aristophanes’ appropriation. Indeed, it seems that the opposite was true: Aristophanes’ choice to repeatedly and extensively appropriate and parody Euripides’ texts was a legitimization of Euripides’ status as an important tragedian. It is unclear that Aristophanes ‘devalued’ Euripides, as Revermann suggests; the fact that the *Frogs* positions Euripides as a possible (albeit ultimately unsuccessful) competitor of Aeschylus, whose status as a classic had already been established, suggests that as Aristophanes’ favorite target Euripides had suffered no loss of prestige. Indeed, the opposite may have been the case. The mutually beneficial intertextual dialogue between the two playwrights provided them both with the tools to better develop the characteristic styles that differentiated them from their competitors.

In the last quarter of the fifth century, allusion to the works of other playwrights – both within and between the genres of comedy and tragedy – was a crucially important part of the development of a unique dramatic brand. Scholars often wonder if the fifth-century audience would have been as aware of literary allusions as scholars are; as Oliver Taplin points out, “We read nervously and self-consciously, observing minute correspondences between those few tragedies we have. We should not forget the quite different state of consciousness experienced in

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139 For many years, however, this was the standard view; Behler (1985) argues that the Schlegels’ view that Aristophanes had been “assigned by God as Euripides’ ‘eternal scourge’” had a deep impact on the nineteenth century’s *damnatio* of Euripides.

140 Rosen (2006) argues that paratragedy played a crucial role in cementing the status of tragedians as classics. He poses the question (p. 28): “If there were no Aristophanes, would Euripides (for example) have become the “classic” that he eventually did? What specific role, in other words, did paratragedy play in this process of solidifying a comic poet’s reputation? While we cannot expect a simple or monolithic answer to such questions, I would like to suggest in this chapter that the forms of sustained parody and satire directed ‘against’ tragedy in the comic drama of the period can be considered at least one important means by which tragic poets secured a reputation, and in some cases were even turned into classics within their own time. To put it another way, without the consistent ‘feedback loop,’ so to speak, that comic paratragedy provided for tragedy, the canon of tragic poets, and their individual status within it, might very well have evolved rather differently than it did.”
the theatre.” However, while Taplin might be correct about the “state of consciousness” of most of the audience, it seems likely that the other playwrights present would be as attuned to “minute correspondences” as modern scholars are. Revermann claims that allusion in Attic drama generated in the audience “various strata of connoisseurship, creating a theatre of what may be branded ‘layered inclusion’ which manages not to alienate any viewer.” Revermann’s concept of ‘layered inclusion’ is an extremely valuable one, since obviously the highest stratum of connoisseurship would be occupied by the playwrights themselves. Any critical appropriation or parody of another playwright’s work, either within or between genres, relies on this fact: placement within that highest stratum grants the authority to point out the characteristic tendencies that differentiate his work.

Cratinus, Eupolis, and Aristophanes would certainly all be in the highest stratum of connoisseurship for each other’s comedies, and the evidence suggests that they were extremely watchful both for appropriation of each other’s works and for manipulations and distortions of their personas. As rivals with similar levels of skill, all three comedians were each other’s best critics. Similarly, Euripides would have been in the highest stratum of connoisseurship for Aeschylus’ tragedies, and his reworkings of the Oresteia in the Electra and the Orestes reflect his

141 Taplin (1986) 171.
142 Revermann (2006b) 101. He continues (p. 103, with original emphasis): “Paratragedy implies… different levels of understanding, and the notion of stratification is bound to be a vital part of any viable solution to the competence issue… it normally invites, even demands, the audience to respond at various levels of sophistication. This, it may be argued, it in fact a prime function of paratragedy: to unite the audience in their general ability to spot a paratragic ‘environment’, ‘atmosphere’ or ‘mood’, and simultaneously to differentiate between members of the audience according to their levels of appreciation.”
143 If, as Revermann (2006b) 115 argues, participation in a chorus alone was enough to significantly increase level of competence and engagement – defined as “an umbrella-notion for a complex set of sub-skills which are diverse in nature (horizontal axis) and can be mastered to different degrees (vertical axis)” – then surely the highest degree of competence would be held by those who participated in the writing of tragedies and comedies.
attempts to negotiate his position in relation to his esteemed predecessor. Most importantly for my study, Aristophanes was certainly in the highest stratum of connoisseurship for Euripides’ tragedies. As I will discuss more in later chapters, this stratification becomes a crucially important element in the textual interaction between the two playwrights. When Aristophanes makes Euripides a character in his plays, he implies that he is some kind of authority on Euripides and what characterizes his tragic style. No matter how distorting that image may be, he nevertheless both depends on and manipulates the audience’s perception that he is a skilled reader of Euripides’ tragedies.

In many ways, Aristophanes and Euripides appropriate from each other’s works just as they would from other playwrights within their own genres. They rely on the same intertextual techniques and complicated dynamics of authority that exist between Aristophanes and his comic rivals and when Euripides manipulates the _Oresteia_. But as playwrights operating in different genres, Aristophanes and Euripides were not rivals, and their intergeneric dialogue is not a competition from which only one could emerge victorious. Instead, their development of variations on each other’s themes was a mutually beneficial intertextual relationship that elevated both playwrights.
CHAPTER 2
THE CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN: THE EURIPIDEAN COSTUME OF MENELAUS IN EURIPIDES’ HELEN

One of Aristophanes’ favorite running gags about Euripides was that he had a predilection for staging kings in rags. An entire scene in the Acharnians is dedicated to mocking this tendency, and in the Frogs Euripides’ ragged kings seem to infuriate Aeschylus, who calls the younger tragedian a πτωχοποιὲ καὶ ρακιοσυρραπτάδη (beggar-maker and rag-stitcher, Frogs 842) and complains that πρώτον μὲν τοὺς βασιλεύοντας ράκι᾽ ἀμπισχών, ἵν᾽ ἐλεινοὶ / τοῖς ἀνθρώποις φαίνοιντ᾽ εἶναι (first you dressed kings in rags so that they’d appear pitiful to the audience, Frogs 1063-4). Although two decades passed between these two scenes, Aristophanes was still joking about Euripides’ kings in rags. He may have made similar jabs in lost plays as well.¹

The fact that Aristophanes turned Euripides’ ragged heroes into a running gag does not mean that characters such as Telephus would have seemed amusing when first performed. As Justina Gregory writes:

If Aristophanes appropriates an element from Euripides for comic effect, does that mean that it was already risible in its original context? It is all too easy to read Euripides backwards, through the eyes of Old Comedy. Once Aristophanes has exploited a certain Euripidean technique – for example, kings in rags – we tend to register that motif as already comical in its original context. Yet it

¹ Several of Aristophanes’ lost plays, including his Pròagon, Lemniae, and Phoenissae, parodied Euripides at length; see Introduction, pp. 2-3. But one-liner jokes about ragged Euripidean heroes may also have appeared in other plays as well. In the Peace, a play that contains Euripidean parody without focusing on it, Trygaeus’ daughter tells him, ἐκεῖνο τήρει, μὴ σφαλεὶς καταρρυῇς / ἐντεῦθεν, εἶτα χωλὸς ἢν Εὐριπίδη / λόγον παράσχῃς καὶ τραγῳδία γένη (take care that you don’t fall down from here, and then as a cripple you would give Euripides material to write a tragedy; Peace 146-8). Clearly any play, regardless of whether it primarily focused on mocking Euripides or not, could have incorporated a brief joke about his kings in rags.
is a mistake to assume that all comic invocations of tragedy are designed to expose weaknesses that were inherent in the original.\(^2\)

However, I would argue that Gregory is only partially correct, and Aristophanes’ appropriation of Telephus is in fact “designed to expose weaknesses that were inherent in the original.” As Aeschylus complains in the *Frogs*, a ragged costume is an effective but also underhanded way to arouse sympathy in one’s audience, even if such sympathy is undeserved.\(^3\) Furthermore, by listing in the *Acharnians* a large number of characters who fit this classification, Aristophanes implies that Euripides overuses this trick, subtly accusing the tragedian of a lack of creativity.

The extensive parody of the *Telephus* in the *Acharnians*, however, is not only a mockery of Euripides’ tendency to stage heroes in rags, but also an imitation and appropriation of that trope. Manipulation of the audience is a common feature in comedy, particularly in comic *parabases*, where comedians routinely both flatter their audience and insult their intelligence in an effort to curry favor.\(^4\) The hero in rags, therefore, was perfectly suited to exploitation in a comic context. In the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes defines the beggar hero as characteristically Euripidean while developing his own comic variation on the character. The comic beggar-hero

\(^2\) Gregory (1999-2000) 63-4. Thalmann (1980) 269 seems to be arguing against this type of assumption when he claims that there is no humor in Xerxes’ rags in the *Persians*: “We may as well dismiss flatly the notion that in offering his audience the spectacle of Xerxes in the tatters of his royal finery, Aeschylus diminished tragic dignity or deliberately indulged in bathos to ridicule a defeated enemy. Xerxes’ rags convey a serious meaning – or rather, several related meanings at once.”

\(^3\) Aeschylus goes on to complain that rich men are now dressing themselves in rags to avoid having to become trierarchs (*Frogs* 1065-6). Although it seems unlikely that such a thing ever occurred, Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* is certainly guilty of assuming rags as a costume for his own financial gain. As Wyles (2011) 102 points out, “In fact, of course, following Aeschylus’ logic, Aristophanes was just as culpable, if not more so, in this respect, since he had offered the model to the citizens for the ‘adopt a rag costume from Euripidean drama’ ruse; in effect, Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* can be argued to be responsible for giving the citizens this idea. The awareness of this and the sense of irony that it creates in this joke, makes it clear that this part of the objection is not meant as a serious criticism against the Euripidean way of doing drama in particular…”

\(^4\) See Chapter 1, p. 72, n. 128.
intentionally and self-consciously alters and capitalizes on his own costume and appearance in order to manipulate audiences both internal and external to the play. Dicaeopolis uses his beggar costume to inspire pity in his internal audience, the chorus, and humor in his external audience, the audience watching the comedy in the Theater of Dionysus.

Euripides responded to Aristophanes’ mockery in his later plays by continuing to write about ragged heroes while building on Aristophanes’ variation on the theme. In this chapter, I will focus primarily on the characterization and costuming of Menelaus in the Helen, although a similar phenomenon appears in Electra’s use of her costume in Euripides’ Electra. Euripides’ beggar-heroes after the Acharnians are far more self-conscious than their predecessors. They reflect often and at length on the wretchedness of their appearances in a manner that seems to call attention to their status as typical Euripidean ragged heroes. But, like Dicaeopolis, they also take advantage of their raggedness to manipulate other characters into feeling pity for them, then use that complacency and sympathy to fool their enemies. Menelaus is more similar to Dicaeopolis playing the role of Telephus than he is to the original Telephus.

Since the Helen responds to and incorporates extensively material from comedy, such as Aristophanes’ mockery of Euripidean beggar heroes, it is perhaps no surprise that scholars have had difficulty categorizing the play’s genre.\(^5\) Whether the play is a light-hearted tragedy, a truly

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\(^5\) Already 40 years ago, Schmiel (1972) 275 wrote, “It has been described in every conceivable term: tragedy, tragi-comedy, historical allegory, romance, burlesque, satyr play, parody, comedy.” Whitman (1974) 35 agreed: “Although commonly classed as one of the ‘tragi-comedies’, it has been called everything from ‘a parody of the Iphigenia at Tauris’, a ‘farce’, ‘no tragedy’, and ‘a comedy from beginning to end’ to ‘a brilliant failure’, ‘a powerful and moving drama’, ‘a comedy of ideas’, ‘tragedy manquée’, and a mixture of ‘theology and irony’. In a situation as desperate as this it is perhaps safest to call it what the Greeks called it, a tragedy.”
‘tragic’ tragedy, or a comedy is a matter of considerable debate. Some scholars claim that the Helen is a comedy and not a tragedy at all, while others argue that it is a sort of proto-New Comedy or a tragicomedy. On the other hand, a few argue that the Helen is a completely ‘tragic’ tragedy that has no relationship with comedy at all. Most scholars, however, have agreed on a compromise whereby the Helen remains a tragedy while still having some comic features. The general (although not total) scholarly consensus on the mixture and interplay of tragedy and comedy in the Helen seems to be that Euripides was experimenting in some way, pushing the boundaries of what tragedy could do by incorporating the elements of a completely different

6 In 1970, Podlecki published an article entitled “The Basic Seriousness of Euripides’ Helen”, obviously meant as a response to Burnett’s 1960 article “Euripides’ Helen: A Comedy of Ideas”. The strongly contradictory nature of the titles of these articles is, unfortunately, symptomatic of scholarship on the Helen in general. Either it is, as Pucci (1997) 61 claims, “a pleasant and witty play” or it is, as Wright (2005) 337 claims, “among Euripides’ most pessimistic plays.”

7 Among the many who have taken this stance, a few stand out, especially Burnett (1960). Gregory (1999-2000) 61 gives a brief history of scholars who have thought that the Alcestis, Ion, Helen, and IT were the first modern comedies. More recently, Meltzer (1994) 246 goes so far as to say that “Euripides makes great comedy out of Menelaus’ confusion” and “Euripides is clearly having fun with the topos of the recognition-scene”. Less decisively, Wolff (1973) 82 writes that “something like comedy is at work.” Barnes (1964) is the major proponent of tragicomedy, a classification that many find useless and anachronistic, especially Mastronarde (1999-2000) 35-6 and Wright (2005) 10. Perhaps the most interesting generic analysis is that of C. Segal (1971), who puts a great deal of energy into developing a comparison between the Helen and The Tempest but then eventually remarks that “The issue of whether the play is comedy or tragedy is, in the last analysis, irrelevant” (p. 613).

8 Wright (2005) 7-9 is a good review of the major supporters of the interpretation of the Helen as a truly tragic tragedy.

9 One such feature, seemingly unique in extant tragedy, is the apparent reworking of the song of Tereus at Birds 209-16 in Helen 1107-13; see Dover (1972) 149.
genre.\textsuperscript{10} In 2005, Matthew Wright attempted to put an end to the debate for good and prove that “\textit{Helen} and the other escape-tragedies are deadly serious, and unambiguously tragic.”\textsuperscript{11} But his attempt to close the book on the generic argument seems to have failed, and few would consider the matter completely settled.\textsuperscript{12} The earlier arguments for the play’s lightness and humorous touches have been too influential to be dismissed completely, but the obviously tragic performance context and conventions of the \textit{Helen} – and its lack of comic conventions – make it impossible to declare unproblematically that it is a comedy.

Menelaus has often been the crux of arguments about the \textit{Helen}’s generic status. Scholars who think the play is a comedy argue that we should laugh at the hero’s initial physical

\textsuperscript{10} According to Gregory (1999-2000) 60-1, this interpretation dates back as far as the Schlegel brothers. Burnett (1960) 155 writes that “Euripides has hung some of the baubles of Old Comedy in the branches of the tragic structure.” On the other hand, Mastronarde (1999-2000) 26 completely denies that any of this genre-mixing occurs, arguing instead that tragedy was so fluid and inclusive that it was impossible to truly ‘violate’ the generic boundaries. The \textit{Helen} is persuasive evidence for Mastronarde’s argument, since it shows to varying degrees the influence of many disparate genres of discourse, including the ethnographic parts of Herodotus’ \textit{Histories}, the rhetorical exercises of Gorgias, and Presocratic philosophy. On the influence of philosophical works on the \textit{Helen}, see Wright (2005) 226-337. Wright also addresses the influence of Herodotus (pp. 177-201) and argues, contra Hall (1987), that Euripides’ Black Sea in the \textit{IT} and Egypt in the \textit{Helen} have little to do with reality. Many non-dramatic poetic forms also seem to have been key influences. The plot of the \textit{Helen} has marked similarities to Homer’s \textit{Odyssey}; Eisner (1980), Foley (1992), Holmberg (1995), Friedman (2007), and Torrance (2009) 1, n. 2 have good summaries of the connections between the \textit{Helen} and the \textit{Odyssey}. Furthermore, two of the lyric passages in the play, Helen’s unusual ‘paean to the dead’ (165-252) and the so-called ‘Mountain Mother Ode’ (1301-1368), have been much discussed as representatives of contemporary musical experimentation; on lyric poetry and the \textit{Helen}, see Csapo (1999-2000) and (2004), Ford (2010), and Steiner (2011).

\textsuperscript{11} Wright (2005) 235, although he occasionally seems to confuse his terminology, using the word ‘tragic’ both in an ancient sense (relating to performance context) but also sometimes in a more modern conception of ‘the tragic’.

\textsuperscript{12} See especially the reviews of \textit{Euripides’ Escape Tragedies} by Foley (\textit{AJP} 127: 465-9) and Lloyd (\textit{CR} 56: 24-26). I owe a particular debt to Foley’s observation that “Euripides’ emphasis on the rags in \textit{Helen}… could even be viewed as an implicit response to such comic parody” (467).
appearance (Anne Pippin Burnett calls him a “ragged buffoon”)\textsuperscript{13} and at his bombastic manner of speaking, while those who insist on the play’s seriousness claim that we should feel the pathos of a great Homeric hero brought so low.\textsuperscript{14} The idea that Menelaus is somehow a funny character has been very influential and widespread, and not necessarily wrongly. But whether or not one finds Menelaus amusing is, in the end, mostly a matter of personal taste. Aside from this highly subjective metric, the only other guide available is the reactions of the other characters, and unfortunately the meanings and valences of the words used to describe Menelaus’ appearance are often unclear. It is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to guess with any accuracy whether the Athenian audience would have been more amused or saddened by Menelaus dressed in a tattered sail, although I suspect that the horrified reaction of the other characters in the play should serve as a clue that his appearance was not solely hilarity-inducing. Nevertheless, he is still an odd figure, bewildered by his surroundings and yet possessing an almost metatheatrical awareness that he is taking part in a drama. Much of what scholars have considered funny about Menelaus, I will argue, is a result of his role as a post-Acharnians ragged Euripidean hero.

\textsuperscript{13} Burnett (1960) 153; however, Wright (2005) 27 argues that the “hilarity” of the Helen has often been exaggerated through willfully comic translation, and that Burnett is particularly guilty of this transgression. Wright claims that, as part of her argument that the Helen is a comedy, Burnett tends to translate in a way that emphasizes the ridiculousness of the situation. When Menelaus insists that he is not a thief and Helen responds καὶ μὴν στολήν γ᾽ ἀμορφὸν ἀμφὶ σῶμ᾽ ἔχεις, Burnett (1960) 152 translates Helen’s retort in such a way as to give it a comic tone, “[Helen] answers doubtfully, ‘Well, you’ve certainly got a nasty way of dressing’.” Doubtfully” is certainly Burnett’s interpretation rather than translation, and she makes Helen’s answer extremely colloquial. Translation is always an inherently interpretive act. It is easy to confuse philology, interpretation, and translation; the scholar decides that a line has a humorous tone, then translates and interprets accordingly without questioning why he or she finds the line amusing or how the original audience would have perceived it. Foley (2006) 467 points out that Wright himself is also guilty of what he calls Burnett’s “unscrupulous technique” (p. 229).

\textsuperscript{14} Papi (1987) 33 calls him “falsely heroic” and Meltzer (1994) 245 calls him a “comically ineffectual figure”. On the other side of the argument, Gregory (1999-2000) 60 argues that heroes in rags were originally a democratic and inclusive move on Euripides’ part, not a comic one. Podlecki (1970) 440 argues that Menelaus is pathetic, not comic. Torrance (2009) 1, n. 5 has an excellent summary of different viewpoints. Most of these interpretations fall into line with the critic’s opinion of the play as a whole, but the exception is C. Segal (1971) 575, who sees Menelaus as non-comic in a primarily comic play.
In this chapter, I do not develop a unified theory of either the genre or the tone of the Helen. Although I remain unconvinced that the play truly contains “openly comic scenes”\(^{15}\) or that the play’s exotic setting and happy ending define it as a comedy in any meaningful sense,\(^{16}\) I agree with the majority of scholars who believe that the Helen was strongly influenced by Old Comedy. That influence, however, should not be understood as generic transgression or as Euripides borrowing elements of comedy in order to create a new and original kind of tragedy, but as part of Euripides’ dialogue with Aristophanes. The Helen includes one of a succession of variations between the two playwrights on the theme of audience manipulation through costume.

I. “Many people are badly off – you’re not the only one” (Helen 464)

The ragged hero was not a trope unique to or innovated by Euripides; as many have pointed out, there are representatives of this type of hero in rags found in the extant plays of both Aeschylus (Xerxes in the Persians) and Sophocles (Philoctetes).\(^{17}\) It is possible that had we more examples of the genre, we would see that the hero in rags made regular appearances in tragedy. Regardless, the bedraggled beggar-hero is rightly considered to be a primarily Euripidean character because Aristophanes proclaimed that it was so in the Acharnians. Although audiences before 425 may not have noticed that Euripides had staged heroes in rags more frequently than

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\(^{15}\) Papi (1987) 27.

\(^{16}\) Knox (1979) 251 points out that while Aeschylus’ Oresteia and Sophocles’ Philoctetes both end on positive notes, but neither has been thought of as a comedy. Wright (2005) 223-5 argues for the ambivalence of the Helen’s ending and points out (p. 37) that many tragedies have happy endings and some comedies have unhappy endings, such as the arson that ends the Clouds. Allan (2008) 37 mentions at least 11 plays with similar last-minute escapes.

\(^{17}\) Allan (2008) 34 suggests that Aristophanes invented the idea that this was particularly characteristic of Euripides.
other tragedians did, Aristophanes claimed that in Euripides’ works these characters are both numerous and unusually eloquent. In the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes can be said to have created the category of the Euripidean beggar-hero by classifying several of Euripides’ characters as a distinct subset with a number of shared defining traits. The defining trait of the hero in rags is the ability to inspire pity in the audience, and in the *Acharnians* Dicaeopolis exploits this feature to his advantage when he dons the costume of Telephus, who is at the same time the most pathetically wretched and crippled as well as the canniest and most eloquent example of the Euripidean king in rags.

The Euripides scene in the *Acharnians* takes place at a point in the play when the main character Dicaeopolis (whose name is not mentioned until he introduces himself to Euripides at line 406) has barely managed to escape death by stoning at the hands of the chorus of elderly citizens of Acharnae who are infuriated that he has made a private peace treaty with Sparta. After Dicaeopolis takes a coal-scuttle hostage, the chorus agrees under duress to listen to a reasoned argument explaining his actions (338-40). Facing the pressure of having to convince the hostile veterans of the Persian war not to execute him, Dicaeopolis decides to turn to Euripides for aid. He purports to seek out Euripides because of the tragedian’s penchant for staging beggars as his heroes. He has decided that the right outfit is crucial to his success:

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ἀλλ’ ἀντιβολῶ πρὸς τῶν γονάτων σ’, Ἐυριπίδη,
δός μοι ῥάκιόν τι τοῦ παλαιοῦ δράματος.
δεῖ γάρ με λέξαι τῷ χορῷ ῥήσιω μικράν.
αὕτη δὲ θάνατον, ἢν κακῶς λέξω, φέρει.
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(Acharnians 414-7)

But I supplicate myself to you, Euripides, give me the ragged bits of one of your older tragedies. I need to orate a great speech to the

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18 If, indeed, he did stage them more frequently; we cannot know either way.
chorus, and if I speak badly, it will mean my death.

After Euripides offers him the costumes of several different tragic heroes, they finally settle on the rags of Telephus. Dicaeopolis then proceeds to wheedle away from Euripides a truly staggering number of props, almost certainly more than would have existed in the original tragedy,\(^{19}\) to accessorize his new costume. Finally Euripides gets fed up and kicks him out, and Dicaeopolis commences his successful oration to the chorus.

Dicaeopolis’ stated reasons for wanting to become a Euripidean beggar-hero are twofold. First, he claims, a ragged costume will make him more pitiable to his audience, the Chorus; he begs them to “allow me, before I speak, to dress myself as wretchedly as possible” (νῦν οὖν με πρώτον πρὶν λέγειν ἔσαστε / ἐνσκευάσασθαι μ’ ὁιον ἀθλιῶτατον, 383-4). Furthermore, Dicaeopolis reasons, Euripides’ beggars are often unusually clever and articulate, and by dressing up as one of them he might be able to usurp some of that eloquence:\(^{20}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\omega \; \text{Zeû διόπτα καὶ κατόπτα πανταχῆ,} & \quad 435 \\
[\text{ἐνσκευάσασθαι μ’ ὁιον ἀθλιῶτατον}] & \\
\text{Εὐριπίδη, ’πειδήπερ ἐχαρίσω ταδί,} & \\
\text{κακείνα μι δὸς τὰκόλουθα τῶν ῥακῶν,} & \\
\text{τὸ πυλίδιον περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τὸ Μύσιον.} & \quad 440 \\
\text{δεὶ γάρ με δάξαι πτωχὸν εἶναι τῆμερον,} & \\
\text{ἐναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμῖ, φαύνεσθαι δὲ μή́} & \\
\text{τούς μὲν θεατὰς εἰδέναι μ’ ὅς εἰμ’ ἐγὼ,} & \\
\text{τοὺς δ’ αὖ χορευτὰς ἡμᾶς παρεστάναι,} & \\
\text{ὁπως ἄν αὐτῶν ῥήματιοι σκιμάλαισο.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\(\text{Acharnians 435-44}\)

O Zeus who everywhere watches over and oversees, [allow me to

\(^{19}\) Macleod (1974) has an interesting (if slightly outlandish) theory that Euripides’ ‘rags’ refer not to literal rags, but to the ragged scrolls of the plays and therefore, by metonymy, his texts.

\(^{20}\) Silk (2000a) 39 and n. 31. Harriott (1982) 37-8 also points out that the beggar costume emphasizes his separateness from the rest of society.
dress myself as wretchedly as possible.\footnote{Olson (2002) \textit{ad loc.} argues that line 436, a repetition of line 384, should be excised, and claims that the joke here seems to be that Zeus “looks through everything”, just as anyone could see through the holes in Telephus’ ragged costume.} Euripides, since you granted me these items here, give me those accompaniments to these rags, the little Mysian cap for my head. I need to seem to be a beggar, to be what I am, but not to appear thus. The audience will know who I am, but the chorus will be made fools, so that I will give them the finger with my phrasicles.

Dicaeopolis here comically conflates correlation with causation. Having identified that Euripides’ Telephus both speaks well and wears rags, he assumes that imitating the character’s appearance will also enable him to imitate Telephus’ eloquence. The costume has the desired effect: immediately upon donning the cap, Dicaeopolis feels that he is “filled with phrasicles” (ἐὖ γ᾽ ὡλὴν ῶρηματίων ἐμπύεπλαμαι, 447). Significantly, Dicaeopolis acknowledges here the different effects that his costume will have on his internal audience within the play and his external audience in the Theater of Dionysus.

It is largely because of this combination of piteousness and eloquence that the rags of Telephus are chosen and not those of any of the many other Euripidean beggar-heroes. Dicaeopolis makes it clear that he seeks the costume of someone who is ἀθλιώτερος (more wretched/poor) than either Oeneus (420) or Phoenix (422), and also πτωχίστερος (more beggarly) than Philoctetes (425). Not even Bellerophon, who fits both of these requirements, will do; Dicaeopolis seeks someone who is χωλὸς προσαιτῶν στοιμύλος δεινὸς λέγειν (a lame beggar, but also glib and clever at speaking; 429). Euripides finally figures out what Dicaeopolis is looking for and orders his slave to hand over the rags of Telephus, which are “on top of the rags of Thyestes, mixed in with those of Ino” (ἀνωθεν τῶν Θυεστείων ῶρακῶν / μεταξὺ τῶν Ἰνοῦ, 433-4). The change in Dicaeopolis upon donning Telephus’ costume is immediate; he instantly
becomes far more eloquent and begins to sound very much like a Euripidean hero, speaking in a more elevated register and even quoting the *Telephus* (440-1).\(^{22}\)

As this quotation shows, Dicaeopolis’ self-identification with Telephus goes far deeper than just borrowing the Euripidean hero’s costume. In his speech to the chorus, he holds up Telephus as an *exemplum* of good behavior: ταῦτ᾽ οἶδ᾽ ὅτι ἂν ἐδρᾶτε· τὸν δὲ Τήλεφον / οὐκ οἰόμεσθα; νοῦς ἄρ᾽ ἡμῖν οὐκ ἐνί. (I know that you would have done that: don’t we think that that Telephus would have done it too? We’re brainless; 555-6). In fact, references to the *Telephus* are scattered throughout the entire comedy from beginning to end.\(^{23}\) In his opening speech, Dicaeopolis quotes the *Telephus* when he calls the fine Cleon had to pay “a worthy thing for Greece” (7-8).\(^{24}\) When Dicaeopolis takes the coal-scuttle hostage, he is imitating the famous scene in which Telephus holds a knife to the throat of the infant Orestes. His entire defense speech seems to broadly imitate the speech Telephus used to defend the Trojans.\(^{25}\) Nor is Dicaeopolis the only character to recall the Euripidean play: when Lamachus wounds his foot on a vine-prop (1178-88), he becomes similar to Telephus, whose foot was wounded by Achilles’ spear, and his slave describes the incident by quoting the *Telephus* (1188).\(^{26}\)

This extensive interaction with the *Telephus* might seem curious to us: why would Aristophanes engage so thoroughly with a play that has been securely dated to 438, thirteen years

\(^{22}\) Fr. 698; see also Rau (1967) 33. Olson (2002) *ad loc.* argues that this fragment is most likely from the prologue of the *Telephus*, where the hero describes why he has adopted his disguise.

\(^{23}\) Rau (1967) 19-42 lists the many appropriations from the *Telephus* in the *Acharnians*.

\(^{24}\) Olson (2002) *ad loc.* argues, contra Dover (1987) 229, that this half-line should certainly be considered an allusion to *Telephus* fr. 720 Nauck and not a common idiom derived from tragedy.

\(^{25}\) Olson (2002) *ad 497-556*.

earlier? The *Telephus* might have been familiar to the audience if it had been reperformed recently, but even then it is probable that most of the audience would have missed quotations and references as subtle as the one at lines 440-1 mentioned above. Furthermore, Dicaeopolis seems to suggest that he is deliberately looking for one of Euripides’ older tragedies when he asks for a costume τι τοῦ παλαιοῦ δράματος (415). Although the *Telephus* was not from early in Euripides’ career, which began in 455, neither was it especially recent. Unfortunately, for most of the tragedies that Dicaeopolis and Euripides mention – *Oeneus, Phoenix, Bellerophon, Thyestes,* and *Ino* – the only clue we have for dating is the *terminus ante quem* provided by the *Acharnians* itself. The one exception is the *Philoctetes,* which according to the didascalia of Aristophanes of Byzantium was produced in 431 in a tetralogy that also included the *Medea, Theristae,* and *Dictys.* Six years is less than half as long as thirteen, but the time differential still creates a very different effect than the parodies in the *Thesmophoriazusae* of the *Helen* and the *Andromeda,* tragedies that had been performed only a year before. It is clear that Aristophanes could have picked a more recent tragedy that would have been more familiar to the audience, so the *Telephus* remains an unusual and remarkable choice.

In an effort to explain why Aristophanes drew so heavily on a play that was more than a decade old, scholars have attempted to compare what little we know of the plot of the *Telephus* to the plot of the *Acharnians.* These arguments run the risk of circularity; for instance, it has been argued that there was a gatekeeper scene in the *Telephus* based solely on the existence of gatekeeper scenes in both the *Acharnians* and the *Thesmophoriazusae.* Heath offers a speculative yet compelling reconstruction of the *Telephus* using the available fragments fleshed

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27 The *Telephus* is securely dated by a testimonium from Aristophanes of Byzantium on the *Alcestis,* which was produced in the same year along with the *Cretan Women* and *Alcmæon in Psophis.*

out with some detail from the Aristophanic comedies. Some of his conjectures are more easily accepted than others: he is not entirely convincing when he suggests that it was Clytemnestra who offered the infant Orestes to Telephus, but his argument that the hostage scene was acted out onstage rather than in a messenger speech is highly persuasive, as is the claim that Telephus defended both himself and the Trojans in two separate speeches.

Heath argues that in the first episode of the play, Telephus, dressed as a beggar, encounters Menelaus and Agamemnon arguing over whether to attack Troy or to attack Telephus’ homeland of Mysia for a second time. Telephus is a cripple, wounded by Achilles in the first Greek raid on Mysia. He makes a speech defending the Trojans, possibly on the basis of the reciprocal abductions of women. Agamemnon is infuriated that a beggar would speak to him in such a manner. After a choral stasimon, Odysseus announces that Telephus has infiltrated the Greeks, and Telephus, without admitting his identity, speaks out in his own defense. The Greeks figure out who he is, and he holds the infant Orestes hostage with a knife. Somehow the

29 ibid. 276.
31 Heath’s claim that Telephus defended the Trojans, contra Sansone (1985a), constitutes a significant portion of the article. He argues (p. 272), “There is no difficulty in seeing why Aristophanes chose Telephus as a model for Thesmophoriazusae; whether or not Telephus defended Troy, the disguised infiltration of the enemy camp is common to both plots and admirably motivates the burlesque. It is harder to see why Aristophanes should have chosen Telephus as a model for Acharnians if Telephus did not defend Troy. Plot elements such as the disguise, integral to Thesmophoriazusae, have no intrinsic function in the plot of Acharnians; they are contrived to sustain the burlesque, which must therefore have been motivated by some other point of analogy. The most striking fact about Dicaeopolis is his willingness to defend the Athenian arch-enemy, Sparta; the need to defend himself is merely a consequence of that. A Telephus who defends only himself and his Mysian compatriots provides a rather tenuous analogy; a much better analogy, and so a more convincing motivation of the burlesque, is provided by Telephus who also, and shockingly, defends the Greek arch-enemy, Troy. Even in Thesmophoriazusae, the relative’s speech is not a self-defence but a defence of Euripides, the women’s arch-enemy; again, the burlesque works better if Telephus defended Troy as well as defending himself.”
33 Odysseus plays a larger role in the reconstruction of the Telephus by Jouan (1966) 232-3.
Greeks learn of a prophecy that Telephus will be the one to lead the successful expedition to Troy, but Odysseus has some difficulty convincing Achilles to heal a foreign hostile leader. Telephus explains that he is in fact Greek by birth. Achilles finally agrees to heal Telephus’ wounded foot, and the chorus celebrates Telephus’ good fortune.\textsuperscript{34}

The most obvious similarity between Dicaeopolis and Telephus is that they both argue against war by defending the actions of the enemy. Both are motivated by personal reasons: Dicaeopolis wants to conduct trades with Athens’ enemies, including Megara and Thebes, and Telephus wants to find a cure for the wound that Achilles had inflicted upon him in an earlier conflict.\textsuperscript{35} Aside from these rather obvious parallels, one of the most interesting connections between the two characters involves their matching costumes. Dicaeopolis dresses like Telephus to absorb his persuasive powers, believing that because Telephus is such a good speaker, dressing like him will confer his verbal prowess. But this connection also goes deeper. When Dicaeopolis puts on Telephus’ rags, he is not only dressing up as the tragic character but also imitating his actions, since Telephus also dresses up as a beggar to facilitate his attempts to persuade the Greek army. For Telephus, the beggar outfit is a disguise that covers up his true identity as a Mysian prince. Telephus differs in this respect from the other heroes whose rags Euripides offers to Dicaeopolis, since Oeneus, Bellerophon, Phoenix, and Philoctetes were presumably not merely dressing up as beggars by choice in order to serve their purposes; they truly have been reduced to a beggarly status.\textsuperscript{36} Yet for Telephus the costume also mirrors reality, in a limited sense, since he does need to beg for the Greeks’ protection (which he gets from Clytemnestra) and their aid

\textsuperscript{34} Heath (1987a) 278-9.

\textsuperscript{35} Foley (1988) 38 argues that Telephus’ motives are completely noble and not self-interested, and that Dicaeopolis is hiding his selfishness in the costume of a far more morally upright hero.

\textsuperscript{36} Foley (1988) 36-7. Wyles (2011) 97 puts it well: “The disguise of rags which in the Telephus seems to have represented costume on an implicit level, in Acharnians becomes theatre costume on an explicit level.”
(which he gets from Achilles). His rags, though assumed as a disguise, also reflect an underlying truth about his situation.

Telephus’ beggar disguise is only a partial boon. Following the model of Odysseus, who disguises himself as a beggar when he arrives in Ithaca in the *Odyssey*, Telephus’ beggar costume does allow him to infiltrate a hostile group undetected. However, when he dares to speak on behalf of the Trojans, Agamemnon becomes angry that an individual with such lowly status would dare to criticize him. When he dresses up as and imitates Telephus, Dicaeopolis faces no such danger. The costumes of both characters work on many levels, creating different reactions in different audiences. Telephus’ beggar costume allows him to deceive his internal audience about his identity, angers Agamemnon, and, at a crucial moment, provokes pity in Clytemnestra. Similarly, Dicaeopolis’ Telephus disguise allows him to trick the chorus into feeling undeserved pity for him (443-4).

The external audiences – the audiences in the Theater of Dionysus watching the *Telephus* and the *Acharnians* – experience the costumes differently. In the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis’ elaborate beggar costume creates humor for the audience, whom he notes will not be fooled as the chorus will be (442). In the *Telephus*, while the audience would be aware of Telephus’ identity, the wretchedness of his appearance still creates pity; in fact, Aristophanes implies that the tragedian relies too heavily on ragged costumes to achieve pathos when, upon giving a

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37 Edmunds (1980) 12 argues that Aristophanes takes advantage of the synergy between himself, Dicaeopolis, and Telephus, and the beggar daring to speak his mind to the general is transformed into the lowly genre of comedy daring to give advice to Athens. Although this idea is attractive, Edmunds seems too inclined to conflate Aristophanes and Dicaeopolis. I am more convinced by Biles (2011) 56-96, who argues that the character and the poet have a “competitive partnership.” On the connection between Dicaeopolis and Aristophanes, see Foley (1988) *passim*. Goldhill (1990) 194 argues that the similarities between Dicaeopolis and Aristophanes create a tension-filled resonance between character and poet rather than an easy identification.
costume and props to Dicaeopolis, Euripides complains to him, “You’re going to take an entire tragedy!” (ἀνθρωπ’, ἀφαιρήσει με τὴν τραγῳδίαν, 464) and then laments, “Alas, my tragedies are no more” (φροοΐδά μοι τὰ δράματα, 470). In the tragedy, the contrast between the inherent nobility of Telephus and his state of poverty as reflected in his appearance creates pity; in the comedy, the incongruity between the increasing decrepitude of Dicaeopolis’ appearance and his correspondingly florid verbiage creates humor.

Scholars follow several competing but not mutually exclusive theories of humor.38 In relief theory, humor works by relieving tension.39 Those who follow the theory of superiority claim that humor is created when we observe and feel joy at the misfortunes of others.40 But the most widely followed theory is the theory of incongruity, which Thomas Shultz defines as “a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke.”41 In a sense, the hero in rags is fundamentally incongruous, since he is a person famous for his wealth and power who has been reduced to the status of a beggar, and it is easy to feel superior to someone who has fallen so low. In tragedy, the potential of the beggar-hero to create humor cannot be fully realized; humor in tragedy, if it exists at all, is rare and fleeting.42 After appropriating the Euripidean beggar-hero into comedy in the Acharnians, however, Aristophanes can exploit his humorous aspects. With Dicaeopolis, we laugh at the incongruity of a character costuming himself as a beggar to become more eloquent; with Lamachus, we laugh at his wretchedness when he returns to the stage after

39 The relief theory is less prominent than superiority theory or incongruity theory, although it has been favored by some who have a more psychological than linguistic focus, including Freud.
40 This theory can be said to date back as far as Aristotle’s Poetics 1449a, where he defines comedy as being funny because it represents inferior and ugly people (ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν ἄσπερ εἴπομεν μίμησις φαυλοτέρων μέν, οὐ μέντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ ἐστὶ τὸ γελοῖον μόριον.)
42 See Introduction, pp. 20-1.
wounding himself on a vine-prop.

In the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes defines the Euripidean beggar-hero as a recognizable character-type, epitomized by Telephus. The overuse of these characters, Aristophanes claims, is an emotionally manipulative tactic on Euripides’ part that forces the audience to feel pity because of the wretchedness of the characters’ appearances. It is ultimately irrelevant whether kings in rags were, as Aristophanes claimed, an idiosyncratically Euripidean trope; after the *Acharnians*, they almost certainly would have been part of Euripides’ brand. But Aristophanes does not only mock this Euripidean tendency; he also appropriates it and creates a new, comic variation on the beggar-hero. The Aristophanic version of the Euripidean king in rags takes advantage, as the tragic version could not, of the potential for humor in the incongruous contrast of a noble and exceptionally eloquent hero wearing the costume of the lowest beggar. He also intentionally and self-consciously uses his ragged costume to manipulate his audience inside the play, the chorus. This purposeful exploitation of costume that characterizes the Aristophanic beggar-hero will be evident in post-*Acharnians* Euripidean beggar-heroes as well; Menelaus is a tragic hero who is heavily influenced by Dicaeopolis.

II. “You wear unsightly clothes on your body” (*Helen* 554)

When scholars wish to show that an element of the *Helen* seems funny, they most frequently point to Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* for evidence. They especially draw from the scene in which Dicaeopolis (and perhaps Aristophanes himself, although one must not equate the comedian and comic protagonist) is openly but admiringly mocking Euripides (393-489).\(^4\) Many of the aspects of Euripides’ poetics that Aristophanes singles out for mockery in the *Acharnians*

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\(^4\) Burnett (1960) and E. Segal (1995) in particular use the *Acharnians* to read the *Helen* as a comedy.
can be found in the *Helen*, such as the ragged hero Menelaus, his abusive and pathetic exchange with the gatekeeper of Theoclymenus’ palace, and the play’s obsession with costuming and the paradoxical relation between appearance and reality. But the chronology here, with the *Helen* postdating the *Acharnians* by more than a decade, is significant, and scholars who use the *Acharnians* to prove that the *Helen* is funny are making an error.\(^{44}\) The fact that some features of the *Helen* have similarities to a *parodic* part of comedy means that they were originally drawn from tragedy, not comedy. When the *Helen* recalls a scene from the *Acharnians* that features extensive parody of Euripides, the result is not appropriation from comedy, but rather a reworking of Euripides’ own earlier themes in light of Aristophanes’ mockery of them.

The hero clothed in rags is neither inherently amusing nor comic, and it would be incorrect to use Menelaus’ costume as proof that he is somehow untragic.\(^{45}\) The long list of characters whose rags Euripides offers to Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* is proof that the real tragedian Euripides frequently staged heroes who dressed similarly to Menelaus long before the *Helen*. The hero in rags did not originate in Old Comedy; Aristophanes appropriated him from Euripides. He saw the comic potential of the trope, to be sure, but that should not imply to us that a hero in rags was more a denizen of comedy than tragedy. For this reason, the hero in rags

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\(^{44}\) As, in an early example, does Schlegel in the tenth of his Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur: “Durch diesen Ausweg wird die Tugend der Heldin gerettet, und Menelaus, der, um die Spötterien des Aristophanes über die Bettelei der euripideischen helden zu bestätigen, zerlumpt und bettelnd auftritt, vollkommen zufrieden gestellt.” A far better analysis is that of Gibert (1999-2000) 88-9 in his rebuttal of the frequent scholarly argument that the *Thesmophoriazusae* ‘punishes’ Euripides for transgressing into the boundaries of comedy: “*Helen* is among the plays most studied for its ‘comic elements,’ and both it and *Andromeda* (probably) belong to the group that most influenced the development of Greek comedy, yet proponents of the punishment thesis, while acknowledging that Euripidean tragedy had recently taken a new direction, do not show that Old Comedy could lay claim to any of the territory into which Euripides was expanding… In fact, nothing like what Euripides had been presenting in his tragedies of the 410s is characteristic of Old Comedy.”

\(^{45}\) As Mastronarde (1999-2000) 27-8 points out, kings in rags may not be kings in full military armor, but neither are they in comic costumes with padding and phalloi.
is less comic than he is pathetic or tragic, and, after the performance of the *Acharnians* in 425, characteristically Euripidean.\(^{46}\)

In Euripides’ *Helen*, Menelaus is even more wretched than his forebears Telephus, Ino, Thyestes, Bellerophon, and Phoenix, because he is afflicted not merely by impoverishment but by the acute disaster of a shipwreck. His appearance is repeatedly commented on throughout the play; each character must react anew to his rags and dissect their meaning. Considering Aristophanes’ classification of the Euripidean beggar-hero in the *Acharnians*, the heavy emphasis placed on Menelaus’ rags in the *Helen* seems to be a self-conscious attempt to position him as a continuation of this character type. In the *Acharnians*, Telephus is singled out as the quintessential Euripidean beggar-hero, but as a self-consciously post-*Acharnians* variation on the trope, Menelaus also has a claim to Telephus’ title.

In his entrance onstage and approach to Theoclymenus’ palace, Menelaus seems extraordinarily similar to Odysseus in the sixth book of the *Odyssey*.\(^{47}\) Both men are shipwrecked in a strange and exotic land on their last stop before returning home from the Trojan War. Both face the difficult and uncomfortable situation of asking a stranger for aid, especially clothing, since Odysseus is naked and Menelaus is dressed in rags. Menelaus, however, shows immediately that he lacks Odysseus’ trademark cleverness and sensitivity. Whereas Odysseus beseeches Nausicaa as tactfully as possible considering the awkwardness of his lack of clothing (*Odyssey* 6.141-8) and uses his considerable powers of observation to make several astute guesses about her social and marital status (*Odyssey* 6.149-8), Menelaus seems characterized primarily by his total bewilderment. He enters and proceeds to give a long speech glorifying his brilliant success at

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\(^{46}\) Wolff (1973) 67 correctly calls Menelaus “a traditional Euripidean ragged hero”.

\(^{47}\) For a summary of the scholarship on the *Odyssey* and the *Helen* see above, p. 84, n. 10, although most scholars focus on comparing Menelaus to Odysseus later in the epic, after his arrival back in Ithaca.
Troy and bemoaning his fall from good fortune (Helen 386-434). Next, he attempts to gain entrance to Theoclymenus’ palace, only to be roundly insulted by the gatekeeper (437-82). When he meets Helen, his complete confusion upon seeing her striking resemblance to his wife and his refusal to admit that the Helen whom he brought with him from Troy is only a phantom (483-593) make him appear foolish and stubborn. It is only after a messenger arrives to announce the disappearance of the eidolon that Menelaus will believe the evidence of his own eyes (597-624), and at that moment he immediately transitions into an affectionate recognition scene with Helen (625-97). From that point on, he is largely overshadowed by his wife’s superior cleverness.48

At his first entrance onstage, Menelaus gives a long soliloquy bemoaning his miserable state (386-434). He makes a rhetorical wish that his famous grandfather Pelops had never sired Menelaus’ own father Atreus so that he and his brother Agamemnon might have never been born (386-92), gives an account of his glorious deeds at Troy (393-6), then recounts his own struggle to get home that has caused him to end up shipwrecked and without either food or clothing (400-24). He then explains that he has come to Theoclymenus’ palace without knowing to whom it belongs, hoping that he will be able to receive aid (428-34). Although his former military successes are a source of pride for him, they also cause chagrin because his status as one of the generals who took Troy makes it difficult for him to accept that he may have to prostrate himself for aid in a foreign land. He mentions this difficulty in his very first speech: ὅταν δ᾽ ἄρηυ / πράξῃ κακῶς ύψηλός, εἰς ἀηθίαν / πίπτει κακίω τοῦ πάλαι δυσδαίμονος (Whenever an aristocrat is in a bad way, he falls into his new unaccustomed situation much worse than someone who has been unfortunate for a long time, 417-9).

48 Worman (1997) 185, n. 113 notes that in all three Euripidean plays featuring Menelaus as a character – the Troades, Helen, and IA – he is characterized as “dependent on bia, slow-thinking, especially in contrast to the female characters.”
This contrast between the nobility of Menelaus’ background and his current misfortune hardly requires such extensive explanation; it would have been clear from his appearance alone. Menelaus most likely was dressed in a beaten-up sail salvaged from his ship, a costume that would heighten even further the distance between his earlier glory and his current beggared state.49 The exact nature of his costume, a subject of some debate, is ultimately less significant than the fact that the characters in the play continually call attention to Menelaus’ wretched appearance. As a reader of the text, these reminders are helpful; as an audience member who can see Menelaus’ costume, the constant references to it might have seemed redundant. Nevertheless, each character in the Helen reacts to and reflects on Menelaus’ rags, and the constant references to his appearance draw attention to the importance of Menelaus’ rags for understanding his character. Rosie Wyles defines a “semiotics of tragic costume” that tragic characters use to analyze each other’s costumes for clues that reveal identity.50 She argues for “a partnership of the visual (the actual costume) and the verbal. The words spoken in the play were a fundamental means through which to activate specific meanings to the costumes presented in a fifth-century production.”51 In the Helen, this verbal negotiation of the meaning of Menelaus’ rags is heavily emphasized; not only do other characters discuss the implications of Menelaus’ costume, he himself also soliloquizes on the same topic.

The actual costume of the actor playing Menelaus may not have differed significantly from that of Telephus: both would have appeared very ragged, but perhaps with little other

49 Whether he is actually dressed in a sail or simply in a ragged piece of cloth of indeterminate origin is a matter of some debate among scholars. Allan (2008) ad 421-2 argues that it was a sail, using as his primary piece of evidence the reference to sail-stitching in the Thesmophoriazusae (discussed below, p. 103).
50 Wyles (2011) 46-60.
51 ibid. 51.
differentiation.\textsuperscript{52} But he quickly starts to speak about both his unfortunate situation and his unusual outfit, two circumstances which are closely intertwined:

καὶ νῦν τάλας ναυαγός ἀπολέσας φίλοις εξέπεσον ἐς γῆν τύμβος ναὸς δὲ πρὸς πέτρας πολλοὺς ἀράβιοι ἀγνυται ναυαγίων.

τρόπις δ᾽ ἐλεύθη πουκίλων ἀμυσμάτων, ἐφ᾽ ἃς ἐσώθθην μόλις ἀνελπίστω τύχη Ἂλενὴ τε, Τροίας ἦν ἀποσπάσας ἐχω.

όνομα δὲ χώρας ἣτις ἦδε καὶ λεώ ὡς οἴδ᾽ ὃ χλον γὰρ ἑσπεσεῖν ἣσαλυνόμην

κρύπτων ὥσθ᾽ ἱστορῆσαι τὰς ἐμὰς δυσχλαινίας ὅταν δ᾽ ἀνὴρ πράξῃ κακῶς ὑψηλός, εἰς ἀηθίαν πίπτει κακίω τοῦ πάλαι δυσδαίμονος.

χρεία δὲ τείρει μ᾽ ὡς ἴτε γὰρ σῖτος πάρα αὐτὰ δ᾽ εἰκάσαι πάρεστι ναὸς ἐκβόλοις ἀμπίσχομαι.

πέπλους δὲ τοὺς πρὶν λαμπρὰ τ᾽ ἁμφιβλήματα χλιδάς τε πόντος ἦρπασ᾽·

(408-424)

And now, wretched and shipwrecked, I have lost my friends and fallen on this shore. My ship is shattered to pieces on the rocks, but the cleverly-fitted keel was left, and on it I barely escaped with unhoped-for luck, and Helen as well, whom I hold now after snatching her from Troy. I do not know the name of this land or its people, because I was ashamed to enter a crowd of people [to make inquiries]. I am hiding [my ragged clothes] out of shame for my misfortune. Whenever an aristocrat is in a bad way, he falls into his new unaccustomed position much worse than someone who has been unfortunate for a long time. Poverty wears me down. I have no food, no clothes to cover my body; what I’m wearing is comparable to rags cast out of a ship. The sea has snatched away the shining raiment and ornaments I used to wear.

Menelaus first describes his appearance as δυσχλαινία (416), a word Euripides uses in the \textit{Hecuba}.

\textsuperscript{52} This suggests another possible joke in the \textit{Acharnians} scene – are all of the different ragged costumes considered by Euripides and Dicaeopolis truly that different?
to describe Odysseus disguised as a beggar (δυσχλαινίᾳ τ᾽ ἀμορφος, Hec. 241). But then

Menelaus seems to tell the audience that the rags he wears are not merely rags, but the remains of a sail. It is true that the phrase εἰκάσαι... ναὸς ἐκβόλος (421-2) might simply mean that Menelaus could be dressed in ordinary clothes that have become waterlogged and ripped in the aftermath of his shipwreck; the rather colorless word ἐκβολος could signify anything that is ‘cast out’, and is used similarly in the Iphigeneia in Tauris to signify shipwrecked sailors (described by Thoas as ἐκβολαὶ νεῶς, IT 1425). However, later in the play Theoclymenus uses the same phrase to ask Helen where Menelaus has stored his shipwreck (λιπὼν δὲ ναὸς ποῦ πάρεστιν ἐκβολα; 1214), suggesting that Menelaus earlier meant that he was wearing part of that shipwreck.

Theoclymenus also refers to Menelaus’ outfit using the word ἀχλαινία: φήμας δ᾽ ἐμοὶ / ἐσθλᾶς ἐνεγκὼν ἀντὶ τῆς ἀχλαινίας / ἐσθήτα λήψῃ ἀπὸ τῆς (Since you have brought me news, you will get food and clothes to replace your rags; Helen 1281-3). ἀχλαινία seems more likely than δυσχλαινία to describe a sail standing in place of clothes, and agrees with Menelaus’ declaration that he has οὔτ᾽ ἀμφὶ ἐσθῆτες (421).

After Helen dresses Menelaus properly, she tells the chorus that πέπλους δ᾽ ἀμείψασ᾽ ἀντὶ ναυφθόρου στολῆς / ἐγὼ νῦν ἐξήσκησα (I have decked him out in robes instead of his shipwrecked garments; 1382-3). But as part of the same deception, Menelaus’ men are ναυφθόρους

53 Allan (2008) ad 416 brackets the line because he considers it a needless elaboration on what part of his τυχή Menelaus is ashamed of. Although I find Allan’s argument convincing, I have chosen to analyze the line as though it were genuine so as not to ignore any piece of evidence about Menelaus’ appearance.

54 It is possible that, when Theoclymenus comments on Menelaus’ ἀχλαινία, he could simply be exaggerating; to a man of Theoclymenus’ vast wealth, drenched rags might be equivalent to no clothes at all. If this were in fact the case, his exaggeration would have been obvious to the audience, if not to a reader.

55 Since the word ἀχλαινία is otherwise unattested, we have no comparison to show whether it meant that Menelaus was literally ‘cloakless’. However, it seems to support the idea that what Menelaus was wearing was not clothing in the traditional sense.
And during this labor, the Greek companions of Menelaus were watching, and they came to the shore dressed in shipwrecked clothes. They were well formed, but appeared ugly.

Menelaus uses the same term to refer to his costume earlier; during his recognition scene with Helen, he tells her not to touch his πέπλος (μὴ θίγῃς ἐμῶν πέπλων, 567). However, even if we can agree that Menelaus’ ναυφθόροι ἡσθημένοι πέπλοισιν men are not in fact wearing sails, he still might have been doing so when he entered at line 386.

The final piece of evidence for Menelaus’ costume comes from the parody of the Helen in Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae: after Euripides and Mnesilochus fail to escape by acting out scenes from the Helen, Critylla complains to the Magistrate that her prisoner was almost stolen from her by a ἱστιορράφος (Thesmophoriazusae 935). The most likely interpretation of this epithet is that Euripides is a ‘sail-stitcher’ because he dressed himself in a sail to play Menelaus, although commentators note that the term may also be understood as generally metaphorical for a rogue, or even that it might mean ‘Egyptian’ because Egypt was the primary exporter of linen, the material from which sails were stitched.

The evidence, while not entirely conclusive, strongly suggests that Menelaus was meant to

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56 The word πέπλος is used to describe many kinds of woven cloth, but not usually sails; LSJ, s.v. πέπλος.
57 Sommerstein (1994) and Austin and Olson (2004) ad 935 both note both of these possibilities. Although Austin and Olson seem to prefer the idea that it referred to Menelaus’ costume, they also point out that the word occurs para prosdokian instead of a synonym for πανούργος.
be understood as being dressed in a sail until Theoclymenus ultimately provides him with
clothes. If so, Menelaus is even more exceptionally ragged than a hero such as Telephus would
have been. But the sheer volume of references to Menelaus’ unfortunate appearance, as well as
the effect that his costume has on the other characters in the tragedy, is more important than
what precisely he was clothed in. Helen calls his outfit ἀμορφὸς:

ΜΕ: οὐ κλώπτες ἐμεν, οὐχ ὑπηρέται κακῶν.
ἘΛ: καὶ μὴν στολήν γ᾽ ἀμορφὸν ἀμφὶ σῶμ᾽ ἔχεις.
(553-4)

Menelaus: We are not thieves, nor the attendants of evil men.
Helen: But you wear unsightly clothes on your body.

For Helen, Menelaus’ outfit is the only initially available evidence for what kind of man he is.
When she first sees him, his appearance provokes real fear that she is about to be raped: she
exclaims ἄγριος δέ τις / μορφὴν ὥδ᾽ ἐστὶν ὃς με θηρᾶται λαβεῖν (This man who hunts me has a
fierce appearance; 544-5). Throughout the play, metaphors of hunting and prey are used to
describe Theoclymenus’ sexual pursuit of Helen, and Menelaus’ unkempt appearance seems to
renew that threat in her mind; his wild appearance leads her to believe that he is a man who has
been hired by Theoclymenus to hunt her down.

Later in the play, Theoclymenus himself seems to find Menelaus’ wild appearance just as
alarming as Helen did:

ΘΕ: Ἀπολλων, ὦσ ἐσθῆτι δυσμορφὸς πρέπει.
ἘΛ: οἴμοι, δοκῶ μὲν καίμον ὥδ᾽ ἔχειν πόσιν.
(1204-5)
Theoclymenus: Apollo, how he stands out in his ugly clothes!\textsuperscript{58}
Helen: Alas, I think my husband must be in the same condition.

The irony of Helen’s response notwithstanding,\textsuperscript{59} Theoclymenus’ reaction is precisely what she and Menelaus had hoped for, since they discussed a few hundred lines earlier how they intended to use his disheveled appearance as the sole evidence to support their story that Menelaus has died in a shipwreck.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{ΜΕ: καὶ μὴν τάδ᾽ ἀμφιβληστρα σώματος ῥάκη}
\textit{ξυμμάρτυρες σοι ναυτικῶν ἑρειπίων.}
\textit{ἙΛ: ἐς καιρὸν ἦλθε, τότε δ᾽ ἀκαιρ’ ἀπάλλυτον’}
\textit{τὸ δ᾽ ἄθλιον κεῖν᾽ εὐτυχές τάχ’ ἂν πέσοι.}

\textsuperscript{58} Although I have tried not to use what Wright (2005) 229 calls the “unscrupulous technique” of manipulative translation in my presentation of the evidence about Menelaus’ costume by avoiding translations that make the lines sound funny, this choice might also be in error, since some have argued that the Greek words do have amusing valences. Foley (2006) 467 argues that these lines should be translated in a comic way: “[Wright’s] translation “tattered” waters down the tone of dusmorphos, which surely implies an unheroic and, by the standards of regular tragic costume, atypical ugliness, as in Helen’s earlier use of amorphos to describe Menelaus’ clothing (Helen 554). Ugliness is linked by both Aristotle and Plato with the comic…”

\textsuperscript{59} Scholars have chosen, for little discernible reason, to use the term ‘comic irony’ rather than ‘tragic irony’ to describe irony in the Helen. Seidensticker (1982) 174 uses the phrase ‘komische Ironie’, and he develops the idea further on p. 191, claiming that the difference between ‘tragic’ and ‘comic’ irony is whether the outcome of the character’s ignorance is disastrous. Burnett (1960) 153 takes a similar approach: “Perhaps chief among the qualities which set this play apart from the rest of Greek drama is its use of a new comic irony. The responsibility of tragic irony, with its burden of knowledge shared by audience and dramatist but withheld from the characters, is laid aside, and the spectator may rest and enjoy the irony of double meanings which are conscious expressions of intention and power.” The dangers of this way of thinking are perhaps best exemplified by Meltzer (1994) 251: “In a scene full of comic irony, using ambiguous language as an “expression of intention and power”, Menelaus and Helen speak in double entendres to deceive the unwitting Theoclymenus. This scene represents the victory of an Odyssean form of kleos based on subtlety and indirection (advocated by Helen) over the aggressive, direct Iliadic form (advocated by Menelaus).” With only a few small replacements – the word ‘tragic’ for ‘comic’, and Agamemnon and Clytemnestra for Menelaus and Helen – Meltzer’s definition could as easily describe Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. In fact, Helen’s deception of Theoclymenus is extraordinarily similar to Clytemnestra’s deception of Agamemnon; both use manipulative part-truths, turning their masterful control over language into a way of controlling their male adversaries. In light of these similarities, it is difficult to understand why Burnett and Meltzer say that one play uses comic irony and the other uses tragic irony. It certainly is not the case that Helen’s deception has fewer tragic consequences than her sister’s, since Menelaus and his men slaughter several Egyptian soldiers as part of their escape.

\textsuperscript{60} The convenience of Menelaus’ ready-made disguise is echoed in the Helen parody in Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae, when Mnesilochus decides to play Helen and notes that \textit{πάντως ὑπάρχει μοι γυναικεία στολή} (I’ve already got the female clothes, 851).
Menelaus: And these rags cast around my body certainly confirm your story that I was shipwrecked.

Helen: They have come at an opportune moment, although before their destruction seemed inopportune. Perhaps this misfortune will turn into good fortune.

Theoclymenus is so taken aback by the unnamed Greek man’s waterlogged rags that he takes Helen’s story at face value and begins to prepare the elaborate funeral barge that will eventually serve as Helen and Menelaus’ escape route. As I will argue, this purposeful and successful manipulation of Theoclymenus using Menelaus’ ragged costume is a variation on Aristophanes’ version of the theme in the *Acharnians*. In the comedy, Aristophanes implicitly claims that ragged costumes always inspire pity, and that this predictable reaction can be used to a character’s advantage. In the *Helen*, the characters recognize that one’s physical appearance can have a broad range of effects on others, including desire, fear, and disgust. But just as in the *Acharnians*, they still intentionally utilize these effects for manipulative purposes.

It is suggestive that the characters call Menelaus ἄμορφος, ἄγριος μορφήν, and δύσμορφος, because appearance, and especially the difference between appearance and reality, is one of the most important themes of the *Helen*. Words containing the root μορφή occur with unusual frequency throughout the play. In Helen’s opening speech, she tells how ἔστιν δὲ δὴ λόγος τις ὡς Ζεὺς μητέρ᾽ ἔπτατ᾽ εἰς ἐμήν / Λήδαν κύκνου μορφώματ᾽ ὀρνιθοὶς λαβὼν (There is a story saying that Zeus flew after my mother Leda, taking the form of a swan; 17-9).\(^{61}\) A few lines

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\(^{61}\) Kannicht (1969) *ad loc.* suggests that Zeus splitting himself into two birds – the swan and the hawk chasing it – was an innovation for this play, a paradigm for how Helen herself is split in two. Kovacs (2003) deletes these lines, but he is unusual in this respect.
later, Helen briefly recounts the story of the Judgment of Paris, calling it a μορφῆς κρίσις (26). If
the text can be trusted, the chorus tells Helen at the end of the Mountain Mother Ode that she is
suffering because she gloried only in her own beauty, μορφὰ μόνον ἡὗχεις (1368). Finally, the play
ends with a gnomic utterance by the chorus, πολλὰὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων, / πολλὰ ἀέλπτως
κραίνουσι θεοί (Many are the forms of the gods, and the gods accomplish many unhoped-for
things; 1688-9). The fact that morphê-words are used so frequently throughout the play suggests that
appearances – not only that of Helen, but also that of Menelaus – are extremely significant. For
Helen, of course, appearance is always a central concern, and Euripides’ heroine seems to view
her beauty as a curse: she often complains about what a burden it has been for her and even
expresses a wish that she could rub it out like a painting (262-6). Teucer tells her that her
appearance does not reflect her inner core (160-1). Menelaus and Helen recognize each other by
appearance before asking for each other’s names, although Menelaus is reluctant to trust his eyes
(τὸ δ᾽ ὀμμα μου νοσεῖ, 575). And Helen in particular is intensely aware of the impact that one’s
appearance can have on others and how to manipulate those reactions to her advantage: not only
does she use Menelaus’ shipwrecked rags to trick Theoclymenus, she also purposely alters her
own appearance into that of a woman in mourning to further the ruse (1087-92). In effect, Helen
turns her and her husband’s appearances into disguises, as Telephus did in the Telephus.

In the Helen, the constant emphasis on appearances seems to border on obsession.

62 Allan (2008) ad loc. points out that in Euripides’ different plays that mention the Judgment of Paris
(Helen, Troades, Hecuba, IA, and Andromache), the story is always altered to fit the specific circumstances. Here, Helen’s powerlessness and the negative consequences of beauty are emphasized. See also Downing (1990) 6-7.

63 The scholarly opinion of the spuriousness of these codas is constantly debated, but Allan (2008) ad loc. has a convincing argument in favor of genuineness.

64 Worman (1997).
Characters frequently assess each other’s attractiveness and make judgments about whether or not their physical aspect matches their actions and personality. They comment on each other’s clothes and use their own as disguises to manipulate other characters. But in a tragedy, the appearances referred to are masks, and the clothes of Menelaus that are so problematic to everyone onstage are a costume. In drama, this degree of attention paid to costume borders on metatheatricality, as Wyles argues about a scene in Aeschylus’ Suppliants in which Pelasgus attempts to infer the Danaids’ identity from their appearance:

Tragedy as a general rule, unlike comedy, does not openly comment on theatre or deconstruct it on stage in front of the audience. Yet clearly the commentary on costume offered here comes close to a type of metatheatre, since it makes a contribution to the theatrical discourse. The discussion of the artform is in the subtext and the technique of commenting through the handling of costume helps to keep it there.65

The fact that so much of this concern over appearance is focused on Menelaus and his tattered sail is a particularly noteworthy strategy, since it could easily remind the audience of Aristophanes’ favorite joke to make about Euripides’ oeuvre. Menelaus becomes, in effect, a self-conscious addition to the long line of Euripidean kings in rags.

Euripides was not (or, at least, not only) attempting to create in the Helen a new and

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65 Wyles (2011) 96.
exciting kind of tragedy – or, as it has been alleged, a new kind of comedy\textsuperscript{66} – by incorporating elements of Old Comedy. Instead, he was participating in a dialogue with Aristophanes’ parodies of his own earlier work. Menelaus resembles Dicaeopolis playing the role of Telephus, as well as Telephus himself, absent the intervention of any Aristophanic parody. But considering the significant time lapse between the performance of the \textit{Telephus} (438 BCE) and that of the \textit{Helen} (412 BCE) and the apparently influential nature of Aristophanes’ parodies, it would have been nearly impossible to divorce the original Euripidean Telephus from Dicaeopolis-as-Telephus in the \textit{Acharnians} (425 BCE). In the \textit{Acharnians}, Aristophanes defined certain features as especially characteristic of Euripidean poetics, including the well-spoken but poorly dressed hero who has fallen upon hard times. Menelaus in the \textit{Helen} exemplifies this type and serves as an exploration of what it means to be Euripidean as defined by Aristophanes.

Menelaus is a truly Euripidean hero in a world where Aristophanes is controlling the discourse on what is characteristic of Euripides. Dressed (most likely) in a sail, his costume is more ragged (\textit{ἀθλιώτερος}) than any of those offered by Euripides to Dicaeopolis in the \textit{Acharnians}. He is more of a beggar (\textit{πτωχίστερος}) than Telephus, who voluntarily chooses to adopt the beggar costume as a disguise. Finally, he too is \textit{δεινὸς λέγειν}, at least enough to

\textsuperscript{66} Burnett (1960) 154: “far from being a tragedy gone wrong, the \textit{Helen} is an experiment in a new sort of comedy in which a romantic plot is used as an excuse for the poetic expression of philosophical ideals.” Considering this argument, it is unsurprising that the \textit{Helen} is one of the plays most used to support the claim that Menander owes more to Euripides than he does to Aristophanes. Post (1964) in particular sees the \textit{Helen} as a significant influence on Menander’s \textit{Dyscolus}, following Webster (1960) 155-6. Unsurprisingly, Post (over)emphasizes the ‘comic’ aspects of the \textit{Helen} (p. 101): “The king Theoclymenus is always a comic figure as well as a paragon of wickedness and false piety. Helen is a persecuted fairy-tale heroine but also a demure and comic deceiver in the final scene where the king is fooled. Menelaus in his early scenes is ridiculous as well as destitute. He recovers his heroic status by steps, first by recognition of the false and the true Helen, then by virtue of Theoneo’s support, and finally by the transformation wrought when he is bathed and clothed by order of the king (1283, 1382-84). This rehabilitation by bath and new habiliments strikingly resembles the ceremony by which a freed slave assumed his new status.”
convince Theonoe. If the Helen had been performed before the Acharnians, his costume would certainly have been one of the ones considered by Dicaeopolis. Yet in a sense Menelaus is a character who could not have been created before the Acharnians, because he exists in a world conditioned on Aristophanes’ parodies of Euripides, a world that constantly seems on the verge of slipping from tragedy into paratragedy.

III. “You might have been revered somewhere else, but you aren’t here” (Helen 454)

It could be argued that Menelaus merely represents the continuation of what had already been a Euripidean tendency to stage kings in rags, and that Aristophanes’ influence played no role in the development of his character. But Menelaus is of a different kind than the other beggar-heroes mentioned in the Acharnians. He is unusually self-conscious about the meaning and effect of his costume in a manner that suggests that he considers himself to be a ‘traditional’ Euripidean beggar-hero, although he refuses to call himself a πτωχός. Menelaus believes that he has undergone a steep fall from glorious general to ragged beggar, and he thinks that the wretchedness of his appearance will inspire pity in everyone he meets, especially when contrasted with the inherent nobility of his nature. He becomes bewildered when this expectation is repeatedly frustrated and the people he encounters react to his appearance not with pity, but with dismissal in one instance and fear in another. His eventual adaptation to his unstable role suggests a greater similarity to Dicaeopolis playing the role of Telephus than to Telephus himself.

67 Helen is usually considered the more persuasive of the two, with good reason. However, Menelaus’ contribution is not insignificant; Theonoe addresses her final acquiescence to Menelaus, not Helen (1004).
68 Menelaus tells Helen that he was denied entrance to Theoclymenus’ palace “like a beggar” (ὡσπερ πτωχὸς, 790). When Helen bemoans his descent to such a lowly status, he replies, “[begging] was the action, but I did not use that name for it” (τοὔργον μὲν ἦν τοῦτ᾽, ὄνομα δ᾽ οὐκ ἔχειν τὸδε, 792). Foley (2006) 467 argues that this sophistic recusatio could be seen as implicit confirmation of the argument that Menelaus embodies a response to Aristophanes’ parodies of Euripidean beggar-heroes.
Menelaus becomes a traditional Euripidean king in rags who also seems to be a self-parody of Euripides’ previous tendency to stage kings in rags.

This relationship – with Menelaus as a descendant both of Telephus and of Telephus as mocked and imitated by Dicaeopolis – is quite complex, so I will first illustrate my point with a simpler example. The most extensive running gag about Euripides in the Acharnians is his use of ragged heroes, but the play also mocks many other idiosyncrasies of Euripides’ tragic style. One of these is Euripides’ alleged enjoyment of paradoxical statements. After Aristophanes mocked this tendency in the Acharnians, Euripides then used the same type of conundrum in the Helen, tying it into a crucial theme of the play. This conspicuous re-appropriation of what Aristophanes had declared to be characteristically Euripidean builds on Aristophanes’ mockery to better refine Euripides’ unique tragic brand.

In the beginning of the Helen, when Helen is coaxing information out of Teucer about how her family members have fared in the seventeen years since she saw them last, he tells her that her mother Leda has committed suicide out of shame. The status of her brothers the Dioscuri is less clear:

ἙΛ: οἱ Τυνδάρειοι δ᾽ εἰσίν ἢ οὐκ εἰσίν κάροι;  
ΤΕ: τεθνᾶσι κοὐ τεθνᾶσι· δύο δ᾽ ἔστων λόγω.  
ἙΛ: πότερος ὁ κρείσσων; ὥ τάλαν ἐγὼ κακῶν.  
ΤΕ: ἄστροις σφ᾽ ὀμοιωθέντε φάσ᾽ εἶναι θεῶ.  
ἙΛ: καλῶς ἔλεξας τοῦτο· θάτερο δὲ τί;  
ΤΕ: σφαγαῖς ἀδελφῆς οὕνεκ᾽ ἐκπνεῦσαι βίων.  

(137-142)

Helen: Are the sons of Tyndareus alive or not?  
Teucer: They are dead and not dead. There are two different stories.  
Helen: Which is more reliable? Alas, I am wretched because of these evils!  
Teucer: They say that they are gods, alike to the stars.  
Helen: You’ve told me the good version. What is the alternative?
Teucer: That they killed themselves because of their sister.

Helen herself embodies the same paradox as the Dioscuri; she both did and did not go to Troy, since her name and image went, but not her body.\(^\text{69}\) This kind of contradictory duality must have been an idea that Euripides had used prominently before, because Aristophanes mocked him for employing such paradoxes in the *Acharnians*:

\[
\text{Οἰκητής Εὐριπίδης: } \text{oúk ēνδον ēνδον ēστίν, eì γνώμην ēχεις.} \\
\text{ΔΙ: } \text{πῶς ēνδον, eìt' oúk ēνδον;} \\
\text{ΟΙ: } \text{ ὁρθῶς, ὦ γέρον.} \\
\text{ο νοῦς μὲν ēξω εὐλλέγων ἐπύλλῳ} \\
\text{κούκ ēνδον, αὐτὸς δ' ēνδον ἀναβάδην ποιεῖ} \\
\text{τραγῳδίαν.} \\
\text{ΔΙ: } \text{ὁ τρισμακάρι' } \text{Εὐριπίδης,} \\
\text{οὗ' } \text{δοῦλος οὐτῶσι σοφῶς ἀπεκρίνατο.} \\
\text{(Acharnians 396-402)}
\]

Slave: He is inside but not inside, if you catch my drift.
Dicaeopolis: How can he be inside but not inside?
Slave: Precisely so, old man. His mind is outside and not inside, collecting little verselets, but he himself is inside, and perched on high he composes his tragedies.
Dicaeopolis: O thrice-blessed Euripides, that you have a slave who replied so cleverly!

In his commentary on this passage, S. D. Olson calls the slave’s response “a typical Euripidean conundrum” and cites examples from the *Alcestis, Hecuba, Troades, IT, Ion, and Phoenissae.*\(^\text{70}\) Of these plays, only the *Alcestis* is likely to have predated the *Acharnians,*\(^\text{71}\) and although there could be many other examples that have been lost, Aristophanes certainly may have had this passage from the *Alcestis* in mind here:

\[^{69}\text{Although, as Pucci (1997) has persuasively shown, this distinction is more rhetorical than actual, and Helen and her eidolon are in fact morally similar and interchangeable.}\]

\[^{70}\text{Olson (2002) } \text{ad loc.}\]

\[^{71}\text{See the attached timeline, Appendix 1.}\]
Θεράπαινα: καὶ ζώσαν εἶπεν καὶ θανώσαν ἔστι σοι.
Χορός: καὶ πῶς ἄν αὐτὸς κατθάνοι τε καὶ βλέποι;
ΘΕ: ἡ δι προνωπής ἐστὶ καὶ ψυχορραγεῖ.

(Alcestis 141-143)

Slave Woman: You might call her both alive and dead.
Chorus: How could the same person be both dead and alive?
Slave Woman: Already she is falling forward and her soul is breaking free.

The *Alcestis* was performed as the fourth play in 438 along with the *Telephus*. Considering the extent to which Aristophanes parodies the *Telephus* in the *Acharnians*, it is not impossible that a reference to another play from the same tetralogy is intended here.\(^{72}\)

The exchange between Dicaeopolis and Euripides’ slave occurs before it has even been made clear why Dicaeopolis is seeking out Euripides at all; he mentions that he wants to dress in a way that will inspire pity (383-4), then says ὧρα ἄτιν ἡ δι θαρτερὰν ψυχήν λαβεῖν. / καὶ μου βαδιστέ ἐστιν ὡς Εὐριπίδην (Now it’s time for me to take courage, so I must go to Euripides; 393-4). The exact reason why Euripides is necessary is not made clear until later on. The interchange with the slave is prominently placed and sets the tone for the entire scene. After Aristophanes parodied this paradox motif and marked it as quintessentially Euripidean, Euripides still chose to reuse it in the *Helen*. This specific story about the Dioscuri committing suicide out of shame is otherwise unattested; it may well have been invented by Euripides for the *Helen* to conform to the fates of Helen’s other family members such as Leda and Hermione whose lives have been ruined by her reputation, and also to create a duality whereby the Dioscuri

\(^{72}\) Allan (2008) ad 138-9. The comparison between the *Alcestis* and the *Helen* is a very fruitful one. Foley (1992) calls them both ‘anodos dramas’ and analyzes the similarities of the ‘return from the underworld’ plots. Additionally, I find it highly interesting (if not at all conclusive) that the *Alcestis* and the *Telephus* were performed as part of the same trilogy, considering that both share so many similarities with the *Helen*. Even though we can only speculate, the idea that the *Helen* represents Euripides’ return to his work from 438 is an attractive conjecture.
could be said to be “dead and not dead”. It might even be a very subtle allusion to the similar moment in the *Alcestis*, since Alcestis, like the Dioscuri, is called “dead and not dead”. In the *Alcestis*, there is no true paradox: she is dead only in the sense that her death is imminent. But in the *Helen*, the Dioscuri truly might be either dead or not dead. Furthermore, the paradox in the *Helen* is more than just a throwaway line; the issue of how Helen both did and did not go to Troy is central to the play, and she seems to embody the same contradiction as her brothers. Euripides has retaken a feature of his own style that Aristophanes had parodied him for and tied it to a central theme, expanding on Aristophanes’ depiction of Euripidean paradoxical cleverness. As Olson’s lengthy list of similar Euripidean passages – many of which are found in plays that date to within three or four years of the *Helen* – Euripides continued to use the technique Aristophanes had mocked him for, perhaps with even greater frequency, embracing what Aristophanes had defined as being a characteristically Euripidean trope.

This small example is representative of a larger phenomenon throughout the *Helen*; Menelaus’ costume also recalls and engages with a typical Euripidean tendency parodied by Aristophanes, the king in rags. In many ways, Menelaus seems not only to be a typical Euripidean king in rags, but to share specific similarities with Telephus, the hero whom Aristophanes had named the beggar-hero *par excellence*. At first, Menelaus seems more similar to the other ragged beggar-heroes for whom rags were not a costume. Burnett argues that for

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74 Although the *Hecuba* is parodied in the *Clouds* and therefore must predate 423, the *Troades*, *IT*, *Ion*, and *Phoenissae* were all most likely performed between 415 and 409.
75 This phenomenon might also be visible elsewhere in the *Helen* on a smaller scale. Allan (2008) *ad 164* notes that Euripides’ first-person lyric monodies are parodied by Aristophanes at *Thesmophoriazusae* 1015-55 and *Frogs* 1329-63; if Aristophanes had also mocked Euripides for this tendency before the *Helen* in a comedy no longer extant, Euripides might here be prominently re-incorporating that Euripidean feature into his *parodos*. 
Menelaus appearances are misleading, since he is a king who is temporarily forced to dress in rags. This is an oversimplification, however, because in a sense appearance does reflect reality: Menelaus genuinely needs to beg for Theoclymenus’ help and charity, so the fact that he looks like a beggar does not truly give a false impression. After the gatekeeper rejects Menelaus, he himself acknowledges that he has been reduced to this state:

κακῶν μὲν ἡμῖν ἐσχατον τοῖς ἁθλίοις,
ἄλλους τυφάννους αὐτὸν ὄντα βασιλέα
βίον προσαείτειν· ἀλλ᾽ ἀναγκαῖος ἔχει.

(Helen 510-2)

This is the worst of all my misfortunes, that although I am a king I must beg for the necessities of life from other kings; but it is necessary.

Menelaus here reiterates the fundamental pathos-generating incongruity between former glory and present impoverishment that is inherent to all kings in rags, the very same trope that Aristophanes had pointed out in the *Acharnians* as being overused by Euripides. Helen also feels the shame of her husband’s reduction in status: she exclaims, οὐ ποὺ προσῆτεις βίοτον; ὦ τάλαυν’ ἐγώ. (You were begging for food? Alas, 791).

Later in the play, however, Menelaus’ rags become a costume that hides his identity as a king from Theoclymenus (1079–80). At this point he begins to resemble Telephus, whose rags are a disguise assumed to hide the fact that he is a Mysian prince and allow him to mingle with the Greek army. This beggar costume also connects both Menelaus and Telephus back to Odysseus. The connection makes sense for Menelaus in the *Helen*; he is similar to Odysseus in many ways, shipwrecked and appealing in vain for guest-friendship. The gatekeeper even tells him that death will be his *xenia* (θάνατος ἕξεινα σοι γενήσεται, 480), much as the Cyclops told Odysseus that his

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76 Burnett (1960) 157.
xenia would be to be eaten last (Odyssey 9.369-70). For Telephus, however, any similarity to Odysseus is especially striking, since in the Telephus itself Odysseus is a major adversary who only later in the play becomes an ally. 77

Another similarity between Menelaus and Telephus is that both face persecution because of their nationalities: Theoclymenus has a policy of killing all Greeks, and Telephus must convince Achilles that he is more Greek than Mysian before Achilles will heal his wounded foot. Both Menelaus and Telephus cannot succeed in their schemes without the aid of a woman: in the Helen, Theonoe agrees not to tell her brother that Menelaus is alive, while in the Telephus, Clytemnestra offers Telephus her protection and permission to beg in the palace (and, as some have argued, colludes with him to stage the hostage-taking of Orestes). 78 Menelaus was also a character in the Telephus, albeit a minor one. His sole function in the play seems to have been to argue with Agamemnon about how to proceed with the military campaign; Agamemnon was wary and cautious after the army’s difficulties in Mysia, while Menelaus argued strongly in favor of going to Troy to get Helen back (fr. 713 Austin). Although it might be stretching the evidence to say that Menelaus in the Helen is somehow based on Telephus, the similarities between the two are certainly intriguing.

But even more than Telephus himself, Menelaus seems to resemble Dicaeopolis playing the role of Telephus in his self-conscious awareness of his status as a king in rags and his eventual

77 Euripides might have been implying that Odysseus’ idea for getting sneaking into his own palace as a beggar was somehow inspired by Telephus’ actions before the Trojan War.
78 Handley and Rea (1956) 30-1 make a good case that Clytemnestra and Telephus schemed together in some fashion, and Rau (1967) 20 argues that, angered about the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, Clytemnestra offers Orestes to Telephus as a hostage. However, Heath (1987a) 276 argues that the extent of their colluding was that Clytemnestra offered her protection to him as an anonymous beggar.
successful use of his costume to manipulate others.\textsuperscript{79} Menelaus is therefore not merely a
continuation of Euripides’ characteristic tendency of writing about kings in rags; he is a further
development on Aristophanes’ variation on the theme in the \textit{Acharnians}. As I have argued,
Telephus is unique among the Euripidean beggar-heroes listed in the \textit{Acharnians} because his rags
are in part a costume that he purposely adopts in order to infiltrate the Greek army. However,
once the beggar costume has served this purpose, it becomes a hindrance rather than an aid to
Telephus’ cause; Agamemnon is outraged that a beggar would dare to speak to him in as
audacious a manner as Telephus does, and Telephus must resort to taking Orestes hostage.
Menelaus and Dicaeopolis, on the other hand, use their beggar costumes not merely to gain
admittance to forbidden places, but also to manipulate the reactions of their enemies to their
advantage. Just as Dicaeopolis uses his Telephus costume to successfully manipulate the chorus
in the \textit{Acharnians}, Menelaus uses his costume to convince Theoclymenus of his tale of woe. The
Egyptian king then magnanimously grants him new clothes and the ship in which he will make
his escape.

Self-awareness about his status as a Euripidean beggar-hero comes naturally to Menelaus;
his opening speech highlights the tremendous contrast between his earlier prosperity and good
fortune as the successful commander of the Greek army that sacked Troy with his current lowly
status as a beggar who must rely on the generosity of others.\textsuperscript{80} It is not until after his

\textsuperscript{79} Although any attempt to fully extricate these two would be futile, since, as I have argued, by 412
Telephus would likely have been heavily influenced by the Aristophanic parody of the character.
\textsuperscript{80} Much about Menelaus’ opening speech has seemed to scholars to have a boasting character, which has
led to the idea that he is a Plautine \textit{miles gloriosus}; see Griffith (1953) 37, E. Segal (1995) 50-51. Particularly
counting against him is his grandiose claim that he personally sacked Troy (in the first person, \textit{πύργους
ἔπερσα}, 402) and the seeming lack of sincerity in his claim that he is not boasting (καὶ τὸδ᾽ οὐ κόμπῳ
λέγω, 393) when claiming that he and Agamemnon were the leaders of a large army. This argument is
both anachronistic and, in light of the many arguments about Euripides’ possible influence on the
reconciliation with Helen, however, that he is able to successfully use his costume to inspire pity in Theoclymenus. Before that reconciliation, he incorrectly expects that he will be treated as other beggar-heroes are; like Dicaeopolis, he believes that simply by wearing rags he will become an object of pity. When this expectation is frustrated, Menelaus becomes utterly bewildered and has difficulty adapting to his new role. As I mentioned above, when Menelaus tells Helen that he is not a thief, she responds by telling him, “But you wear unsightly clothes on your body” (553-4).

Menelaus expects, rather unreasonably, that Helen will somehow divine the incongruity between his ragged appearance and his inner nobility and will be aware that Euripidean characters dressed in rags are often kings who have fallen into misfortune. He is confused when Helen runs to the tomb of Proteus for shelter, wrongly believing that Menelaus’ appearance is indicative of his character.

In the scene immediately preceding, between Menelaus and the gatekeeper of Theoclymenus’ palace, a similar interaction plays out: Menelaus expects that he will become an object of pity and will therefore be able to obtain aid, and he is confused when the gatekeeper harshly rebuffs him. The contrast between Menelaus’ perception of himself and that of the rest of the characters in the play is one of the aspects of his characterization that makes him the most potentially amusing, and Menelaus’ exchange with the gatekeeper has also often been considered funny by critics; in his commentary on the Helen, William Allan notes, “More than any other
devlopment of New Comedy, perilously circular. Since the miles gloriosus is a recognized character-type within New Comedy and not tragedy or Old Comedy, calling Menelaus a miles gloriosus has no more meaning than calling Perseus in Euripides’ Andromeda a iuvenis amator: the anachronistic term adds to our understanding of neither the specific character nor the general type. The most that can be suggested is that he was a prototype for the miles gloriosus, and even this claim seems shaky; Lamachus in the Acharnians is a far better prototype for the miles gloriosus than Menelaus in spite of the fact that many trace the genealogy of New Comedy to Euripides rather than Aristophanes.
scene in the play, this encounter has been interpreted as a sign of Helen’s ‘sub-tragic’ quality.”

As I argued above, Menelaus is characterized by his bewilderment, but that confusion seems very quickly to take on an almost metatheatrical quality: Menelaus seems unsure of how he should behave because he is unable to figure out what kind of play he is taking part in and accordingly match his demeanor to his setting. As he knocks on the door of Theoclymenus’ palace to beg for new clothes, he seems markedly similar to Dicaeopolis in the Acharnians. But whereas Dicaeopolis requires Euripidean rags in order to become eloquent, Menelaus seems unable to turn off his over-the-top tragic diction in order to communicate more effectively with the gatekeeper:

ΓΡ: οὐκοὶν ἐκεῖ ποι σεμνὸς ἔσθ’, οὐκ ἐνθάδε.
ΜΕ: ὦ δαίμον, ὦς ἀνάξι’ ἠτιμώμεθα.
(Helen 453-4)

Old Woman: Perhaps you were revered somewhere else, but not here.
Menelaus: Alas, how unworthily I am dishonored!

Menelaus’ response to being told that he has undergone a change in status is to use an even higher inappropriately tragic register. He makes a similar lament after being told that he has sailed all the way to Egypt, to which the gatekeeper replies, “Why is the shining Nile to blame?”

81 Allan (2008) 198, quoting the argument of Burnett (1971) 82 that here the “already ridiculous tragedy” becomes “an open farce”. Although door-knocking scenes do exist in both genres, they occur more frequently in comedy than tragedy; however, Taplin (1977) 340-1 argues that in the Helen Menelaus never actually knocks on the door, and few would argue with Taplin on a question of stagecraft. Regardless, whether or not knocking took place seems to me a relatively minor consideration. Other tragedies that have similar scenes include Aeschylus’ Choephoroe 653-8 and Euripides’ IT 1304-8, Phoenissae 1069-71, and Bacchae 170-5. No matter how amusing the scene, Menelaus ends up in an even more dire situation than when he enters: not only is he shipwrecked, but he now has little hope of aid and will be murdered if Theoclymenus discovers his presence. The humor stems less from the similarity to a comic type-scene than from the fact that one of the heroes of the Trojan War is being verbally abused and denied entry by an elderly female slave.

82 On the comic nature of door-knocking scenes in general, see Taplin (1978) 105, although Brown (2000) 6-8 argues convincingly that the humor of this scene should not be overstated.
(τί δὴ τὸ Νεῖλον μεμπτόν ἐστὶ σοι γάνος; 462). She clearly does not understand his manner of speech, which contrasts sharply with her own relatively simpler diction.\footnote{Wright (2005) 27 points out that, while there are slightly more colloquialisms in the Helen than average, there are fewer than average in the IT, so this is most likely a problem with our data set. The diction is still far more tragic than comic. For an opposing view, see Griffith (1953), who repeatedly refers to the play’s “colloquial idiom”.}

This mismatch in tone between Menelaus and the gatekeeper reinforces the impression that he is engaging in something like Aristophanic paratragedy.\footnote{As Seidensticker (1982) 172 notes, “Mit dem Auftritt des Menelaos ändert sich der Ton des Stücks erheblich. Seine Auftrittsrede, der Zusammenstoß mit der alten Sklavin am Palasttor und der anschließende Monolog sind durchaus komisch; ernstere Untertöne fehlen nicht völlig, sind aber nur schwach.”} Since his tone, not hers, is the one that seems out of place and strangely elevated, it almost seems that Menelaus is in a comedy and that he is the one using incongruously diction. In the Introduction, I defined paratragedy as “the use in Old Comedy of noticeably tragic style, vocabulary, and meter, especially in a way that contrasts sharply with more traditional comic style, vocabulary, and meter to create a sudden shift in tone.”\footnote{Introduction, pp. 11-2.} The tonal contrast between the gatekeeper and Menelaus is one of the only moments in tragedy that can by this definition nearly be called paratragic. Since Menelaus is the character who seems bewildered and dislocated, the effect is similar to that of paratragedy, when a comic character suddenly and incongruously adopts tragic diction and style.

Menelaus’ bewilderment only worsens when Helen is mentioned. Confused by the gatekeeper’s information that Theoclymenus has adopted a policy of killing all Greeks because Helen of Sparta is in the palace (470-4), Menelaus comes to the slightly foolish conclusion that there must be another Sparta in Egypt with another woman named Helen who is the daughter of
both Zeus and Tyndareus (490-9). A little bit of skepticism and even willful disbelief is understandble, perhaps, since the fact that Helen has been in Egypt all along suggests that all of his struggles and the destruction of Troy were for nothing, although Menelaus’ explanation does not address why Theoclymenus would then want to murder Greeks. But his incredulity continues, to what has been considered an amusing degree, when Helen herself enters. Despite her assertion earlier in the play that she and Menelaus would immediately recognize each other “with signs known only to each other” (ἐὶ μὲν γὰρ ἐξὶ πόσις, ἀνεγνώσθημεν ἄν / ἐλθόντες, ἀ φανέρ’ ἦν μόνοις, ἐς ἔμβολα, 290-1), their recognition nearly fails when Menelaus refuses to believe the evidence of his own eyes, saying that “his struggles convince him, not her” (τοὔκει με μέγεθος τῶν πόνων πείθει, σὺ δ’ οὐ, 593). Just as in his interaction with the gatekeeper, Menelaus does not seem to understand what his role is or what kind of play he is in.

Menelaus is finally convinced not by Helen, but by the speech of a messenger who narrates the disappearance of the eidolon (605-15). In stark contrast to his earlier disbelief, Menelaus now enthusiastically throws himself into his recognition with Helen:

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\text{τοῦτ’ ἔστ’ ἐκεῖνό· ἐξωμβεβᾶσι μοι λόγοι}
\]
\[
\text{ὄι τῷοδ’ ἀληθεῖς. ὥ ποθεῖνος ἡμέρα.}
\]
\[
\text{ἡ σ’ εἰς ἐμὰς ἐδωκεν ὡλένας λαβεῖν.}
\]

\[(Helen 622-4)\]

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86 E. Segal (1995) 51 claims that Menelaus is here similar to characters from Plautus who are shocked to meet people who share their names.
87 The apparent meaninglessness of the Trojan War has led some scholars to claim that Euripides is using the Helen to make an anti-war statement; E. Segal (1983) 248, n. 8 claims, “Despite its ostensibly comic aspect, the Helen is a far more vehement anti-war statement than the Trojan Women.” Papi (1987) 27 claims that the play contains “serious arguments against war along with openly comic scenes,” and Friedman (2007) also argues that the Helen is a commentary on the Sicilian expedition.
88 Conacher (1967) 293 argues that this scene differs from other recognition scenes in that the outcome is joy, not horror (as in the OT) or murder (as in the Electra plays); the deaths of the unnamed Egyptian soldiers are apparently irrelevant, although c.f. Papi (1987), especially pp. 27-8. Seidensticker (1982) 180-4 argues that the scene is funny but has a ‘tragic core’, especially line 593, contra Burnett (1971) 84.
So that’s what this is: her story has turned out to be true for me. O longed-for day, which has given you to me to embrace!

How can this day have been ποθεινός for Menelaus when he had, until only a moment before, believed that he had Helen in his possession? Scholars have tried to explain this oddity in various ways, mostly concluding that Menelaus is something of a fool and that we should not search for any logical rationale in his speech and actions. Although it is true that he is perhaps not the most intelligent character in the Helen – Helen herself and Theonoe both seem cleverer than he does – his behavior is nevertheless better explained by the fact that he exhibits a slightly metatheatrical outlook throughout the play. First, he is keenly aware that his role is that of a Homeric hero, so he has difficulty adapting to the gatekeeper’s lower level. But when he realizes that the time has come for a recognition scene between himself and Helen, he forgets everything that has come before and makes certain to invoke all of the typical recognition scene tropes, including emphasis on a long period of separation and forgetting the danger of one’s surroundings.

After his reconciliation with Helen, and with her aid, Menelaus begins to transition from a bewildered king in rags into a self-conscious manipulator of the effects of costume similar to Dicaeopolis in the Acharnians. Helen is extremely self-conscious about the effects of her own beauty, as one would expect. However, unlike other Helens, Euripides’ version is willing to sacrifice her beauty to serve her own ends. Like her husband, she alters her appearance to

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89 Schmiel (1972) 276-7 points out that his wording is similar to that when Menelaus enters in the Troades, but in that case, Menelaus has been longing for the day when he can kill Helen. Schmiel uses this echo to argue that the recognition scene in the Helen is far from unproblematically happy. Jansen (2012) 332-9 also argues that the reconciliation is not total, and in spite of Menelaus’ first happy exclamation, he remains suspicious and markedly non-affectionate; like Schmiel, Jansen also notes echoes of Menelaus and Helen’s encounter in the Troades as well as subtle references to the myth by which Menelaus found Helen in Troy hiding at an altar of Aphrodite and dragged her away (p. 333 and n. 27, following Foley (2001) 307).
90 Cf. Sophocles’ Electra 1326-38, in which Electra and Orestes are harshly reminded that they have been celebrating their reunion within hearing of Aegisthus’ palace.
manipulate Theoclymenus and to convince him to believe her story that Menelaus has died in a shipwreck; she tells Menelaus, “I will go into the house and cut my hair, and exchange my white robes for black ones, and I will use my nails to dig bloody furrows in my cheeks” (ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἐς οἶκους βάσα βοστρύχους τεμῶ / πέπλων τε λευκῶν μέλανας ἀνταλλάξομαι / παρῇδί τ᾽ ὀνυχα φόνιον ἐμβαλῶ χροός, 1087-9). This Helen is in stark contrast to the more traditional Helen in the Orestes, who is unwilling to cut more than the very ends of her hair to mourn the death of her sister (Orestes 128-9). As I mentioned, in the beginning of the Helen, Helen wishes that she could rub out her beauty, which has been the source of all of her troubles (Helen 262-6). But what actually transpires is even more interesting: when Helen does rub out her beauty, she does so purposely to manipulate Theoclymenus as part of a plan to engineer her escape. Helen becomes, in a sense, a playwright, manipulating her costume and that of her husband to create a play within a play.

But while Helen functions as the playwright and displays a better ability to manipulate costume, it is Menelaus who is most attuned to the potential metatheatrical resonances of their actions. This awareness is most evident when he and Helen are plotting how to escape from Theoclymenus. Helen concocts a complicated plan involving telling Theoclymenus that Menelaus is a passing sailor who has informed her of her husband’s death. Although she is now free to marry, she must first perform a funeral ritual for her shipwrecked husband, for which Theoclymenus will need to lend her a ship so that she can perform a burial at sea. She and Menelaus will then use that ship to escape after killing the Egyptian crew onboard. When Helen asks Menelaus if he is willing to be said to dead while he is still alive (βούλῃ λέγεσθαι μὴ θανῶν λόγῳ θανέων, 1050), he responds to her by saying παλαιώτης γὰρ τῶ λόγῳ γ᾽ ἐνεστί τις (This plan is passé, 1056). Unlike Orestes in Sophocles’ Electra (59-66), Menelaus is less concerned with
the potential for bad luck than for Helen’s lack of originality. He seems to be telling Helen that he
has seen a play with this plot before.

Menelaus almost seems to be commenting, the way a rival comedian might, that Helen’s
plan is derivative and plagiarizes other, more creative schemes.91 In doing so he draws attention
to the fundamental paradox in the play’s treatment of mythology: although the plot of the Helen
is almost completely original and novel,92 it has so many resonances with other works that it can
at times feel almost hackneyed. Although Helen is a ‘new Helen’,93 she seems remarkably like
many old Helens. Scholars have pointed out her similarities with Persephone and Penelope, but
especially (and most tellingly) other versions of herself from the Odyssey and Euripides’

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91 Although some scholars might go too far in seeing this metatheatrical moment as a wholly Aristophanic
technique; Burnett (1960) 154 claims that “Euripides has even used the Old Comedy trick of making an
actor break the illusion and himself recognize that he is appearing in a play.” Menelaus is “transformed for
a moment into an Aristophanic character”. Pucci (1997) 63 agrees: “It is an old comic trick, here freshly
baked by the shrewd Helen, heroine of our comedy of escape. We are invited to reflect on the nature of
comic contrivances.”

92 Sansone (1985b) 18: “This play, more than any other of Euripides’ tragedies, is characterized by
innovation and outright invention. While the basic situation (Helen’s stay at the court of Proteus during
the Trojan War, the εἴδωλον) is concocted out of elements attested before Euripides (Herodotus and
Stesichorus, respectively), the λύσις of the plot comes as close to freie Erfindung as anything in Classical
literature.” Wright (2005) 56-60 agrees, calling the plots of the Helen and Iphigeneia in Tauris
‘counterfactual’ because they depend upon a usual event (such as Helen going to Troy and Iphigeneia
getting sacrificed) having not taken place. Wright does take care to point out (p. 56) that novelty and
innovation do not imply that the play is ‘untragic’.

93 At Thesmophoriazusae 850, Mnesilochus refers to Euripides’ καινὴ Ἑλένη, and his description of Helen
as καινὴ is typically thought to refer not only to the fact that the Helen was produced only one year
previous, but also to the novelty of the plot; see Sommerstein ed. (1994), Austin and Olson eds. (2004) ad
loc.
An odd feeling of deep familiarity hidden within novelty pervades the entire play. In this too the Helen seems to be using a trick from the Acharnians, where Dicaeopolis achieves his aims by explicitly analogizing himself to Euripidean heroes, using the exemplum of Telephus to legitimize his schemes. The Helen is similar in that it subtly recalls other works from epic and tragedy to create a false sense of familiarity that belies the originality of the play’s plot, even as it borrows one of its central figures – a man in a ragged costume who uses his appearance to trick someone who wants to kill him – from the Acharnians.

Menelaus is not the only or even the first post-Acharnians Euripidean character to use a ragged costume to manipulate the emotions of other characters; Electra uses a similar tactic in Euripides’ Electra. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the dating of the Electra is far from certain, but the earliest that it is usually dated is 422. Electra might have been Euripides’ first ragged character after the Acharnians. Like Menelaus, Electra bears distinct similarities to both Telephus and Dicaeopolis playing the role of Telephus. Her rags, like the beggar costumes of Telephus and Dicaeopolis, are consciously chosen by her to achieve a certain effect: in protest of her treatment by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Electra has purposely made herself as pitiable and wretched as

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94 The latter is particularly interesting because the Helen at times can feel a bit like a sequel to Euripides’ ‘Trojan Trilogy’ of 415 BCE, which contained the Alexandros, Palamedes, and Troades. Despite the objections of Koniaris (1973), most scholars have followed Scodel (1980) in seeing this group of plays as a connected trilogy, albeit not as strongly connected as, for example, the Oresteia; see Kovacs (1997) 166. During his initial speech in the Helen, Menelaus’ attitude toward the ‘Helen’ whom his soldiers are guarding in a cave seems remarkably cool, so his intent might still be to publicly execute her when they return to Greece, as he declared in the Troades (1055-7). Nauplius’ trick to avenge his son Palamedes is also mentioned twice in the Helen (767, 1126-31), which seems fairly marked. Although this is pure conjecture, it seems suggestive that Euripides had written a trilogy only a few years earlier in 415 that included both a Palamedes and the Troades, in which Helen attempts to argue in her own defense and is dragged away by Menelaus. Might the Helen in the Troades have been the Helen’s eidolon? Wyles (2011) 89 suggests that Euripides might have used the same mask for Helen in the Troades and Helen in the Helen to “evoke a sense of continuity.”

95 See Chapter 1, p. 54, n. 80. I follow Cropp (2013) in preferring a date in the earlier period of 422-17 based on metrical evidence rather than a date in the later period of 415-3 based on supposed contemporary allusions.
possible. She refuses to go to the festival of Hera because she has no clothes to wear that would befit the daughter of Agamemnon, but when the chorus offers to lend her both a dress and jewelry, she ignores them and continues to lament her fate (Electra 184-93). When Orestes first sees her, he mistakes her for a slave (107, 110), which was almost certainly the effect that Electra intended her ragged outfit to achieve.

Electra is obsessed with clothing. Like Menelaus, she repeatedly draws other characters’ attention to the wretchedness of her appearance; before she knows that her unnamed visitor is Orestes, she makes certain that he notices both her gauntness and her shorn hair (239, 241). She also tells him that when he sees Orestes, he must inform her brother of the poverty in which she lives, which is so great that she must wear filthy rags and would be naked if she did not make her own clothes (303-8). As I have argued, this ostentatious display of penury is at least partly an intentional stance that Electra has chosen. Clothing is also the first feature that she notices in other women: when Clytemnestra appears, Electra’s first comment is, “How she shines in her chariot and finery!” (καὶ μὴν ὄχοις γε καὶ στολῇ λαμπρύνεται, 966). She also castigates Clytemnestra in their ἀγῶν for the fact that as soon as Agamemnon left, her primary concern became improving her appearance, a sure sign that she intended to attract another man in his absence (1069-73). For Electra, clothing is a primary indicator of character.

However, although Electra does use her costume to inspire pity in others, it is not her primary tool for deceit. Ultimately, she tricks Clytemnestra by telling her that she has given birth to a child; Clytemnestra, who still retains some maternal feelings toward her daughter, then comes to visit and falls into the trap set by Electra and Orestes. Although Clytemnestra does

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Zeitlin (1970) 262-4 argues that Electra’s refusal is not (or at least not only) an unnecessary and performative show of martyrdom, but rather a sign that her life is the opposite of the kind of family and marriage celebrated in the festival of Hera.
comment on the meanness of Electra’s attire (1107-8), Electra uses lies, not costume, to convince her mother to come inside her house; in fact, she even tells her, “Go into the poor house, but watch out for the smoky walls lest you get soot on your robes” (χώρει πένητας ἐν δόμους· φρούρει δέ μοι / μὴ αἰθαλώσῃ πολύκαπνον στέγος πέπλους, 1139-40). Menelaus and Helen’s use of costume as a tool to convince Theoclymenus in the Helen is therefore more similar to Dicaeopolis’ use of his costume to ensure that the chorus will sympathize with him in the Acharnians.

In a sense, the Helen functions as a kind of sequel to the Electra. The earlier play ends by mentioning that Helen never went to Troy, but has instead been in Egypt all along. Both plays contain unusual heroines who combine aspects of married woman and parthenos: Electra is a married virgin, and Helen’s quasi-parthenaic status is emphasized throughout the Helen. And both the Electra and the Helen develop variations on the theme of using ragged costumes to control the reactions of other characters, reincorporating a Euripidean tendency that Aristophanes had both mocked and appropriated in the Acharnians. In the Acharnians, Aristophanes brings to light the emotionally manipulative nature of Euripides’ tendency to stage kings in rags. After Aristophanes’ mockery and appropriation of the trope, Euripides beggar-heroes become more self-aware about exploiting the effects of their costumes on internal audiences.

Although the Helen is not a comedy, it has enough paratragic and ambiguously comic

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97 Wright (2005) 111-3 uses the way that the end of the Electra seems to position it as a prequel to the Helen as a piece of evidence that the Electra should be dated to 413, but dating the two plays so closely together seems to me an unnecessary step, particularly in light of the fact that elsewhere Wright (2006a) 35 argues that the Orestes (408 BCE) is a sequel of sorts to the Helen.

elements that critics have been concerned about how to categorize its genre. But classifying the play as a comedy or picking out comic scenes is less fruitful than reading it as an extremely self-reflective play, written by a Euripides who had seen himself portrayed on the comic stage and was forced to consider how he differed from Aristophanes’ depiction, and perhaps more disquietingly, what Aristophanes got right.

The characterization and costuming of Menelaus implicitly validates Aristophanes’ claim that Euripides had a tendency to write about wretched beggar-heroes. Euripides’ reclamation of the king in rags from Aristophanes is analogous to Cratinus’ staging of himself as a drunken comic hero in the Pytinē, albeit subtler. Both Cratinus and Euripides accept and expand on Aristophanes’ mockery of their unique tendencies to refine their characteristic styles. Menelaus’ appearance, and the manner in which the characters in the play frequently remark on and discuss that appearance, serves as a constant reminder of the Helen’s subtle engagement with Aristophanes’ definition of what makes a tragedy Euripidean.
CHAPTER 3

THE PROBLEM OF FEMALE SŌPHROSYNĒ IN ARISTOPHANES’

THESMOPHORIAZUSAE AND EURIPIDES’ BACCHAE

At the end of the Helen, after the Dioscuri appear ex machina to explain Helen’s fate and convince Theoclymenus not to pursue her, the Egyptian king capitulates and tells them:

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\text{ἴστον δ’ ἀρίστης σωφροσυνής θ’ ἁμα γεγωτ’ ἄδελφης ὁμογενοὺς ἀφ’ αἵματος, καὶ χαίρεθ’ Ἑλένης οὕνεκ’ εὐγενεστάτης γνώμης, δ’ πολλαῖς ἐν γυναιξὶν οὐκ ἔν. (Helen 1684-7)}
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Know that you have been born with the same blood as the best and most self-controlled sister. Be glad on account of the very noble mind of Helen; for not many women have that quality.

It is important not to forget how surprising this declaration must have been.¹ While Helen is always depicted as being beautiful, and frequently also clever and conniving, she is almost never characterized as sōphrōn. That elusive character trait is reserved for women such as Penelope, Helen’s cousin and diametric opposite. However, in his Helen, Euripides created a version of Helen who is not only sōphrōn but sōphronestatē.

In the following year, however, Aristophanes wrote the Thesmophoriazusae, a play that takes as its premise the idea that the women of Athens are furious at Euripides for creating so many licentious female characters. Euripides, the women claim, has focused his energy on writing tragedies about badly behaved women and never writes about women who exhibit sōphrosynē (Thesmo. 548). The plot of the play follows the many schemes and devices, often

¹ Although Theoclymenus offers a somewhat backhanded compliment here by praising Helen while simultaneously insulting the virtue and intelligence of the female gender as a whole, his anger is most likely intended at his sister Theone, who has just betrayed him. However, Allan (2008) ad loc. also points out that at Helen 1621 Theoclymenus is shown to have misogynistic tendencies when he bemoans the fact that he has been defeated by γυναικεῖαι τέχναι.
theatrical in nature, that Euripides uses to convince the women not to execute him for his
supposed crimes against them. Despite the fact that no character in the play disputes the justice
of the women’s complaint, a closer examination of the Euripidean texts that Aristophanes
appropriates from and repurposes throughout the play shows a far more complicated picture of
the depiction of female ἕθεσις in both Euripidean tragedy and Aristophanic comedy.

In this chapter, I argue that the Thesmophoriazusae, while using to highly amusing effect
the idea that Euripides often writes about evil women, in fact sets out to demonstrate the
opposite. Euripides’ heroines, particularly the ones in his recent escape-tragedies such as the
Helen and the Andromeda, are never unproblematically ‘evil’. The references to Euripides’ works
within the Thesmophoriazusae itself point to the conclusion that Euripides staged a diverse array
of female characters and that many of those portrayals were positive. The idea that Euripidean
heroines are licentious is one of Aristophanes’ favorite running gags; the accusation made in the
Thesmophoriazusae also appears in the Lysistrata, where the male half-chorus declares that
women are “hated by all the gods and by Euripides” (τασδὶ δὲ τὰς Ἐυριπίδηθι θεοῖς τε πᾶσιν
ἔχθράς, 283) and that “there is no poet cleverer than Euripides: there truly is nothing more
shameless than a woman” (οὐκ ἐστ᾽ ἀνήρ Ἐυριπίδου σοφότερος ποιητής· / οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄδε
θρέμμ᾽ ἀναιδές ἐστιν ὡς γυναῖκες, 368–9).2 Similarly, in the Frogs, Aeschylus takes pride in never
having written “whores like Phaedra and Steneboea” (ἀλλ᾽ οὐ Δί᾽ οὐ Φαίδρας ἐποίονν
πόρνας οὐδὲ Σθενεβοίας, 1043). Turning this running gag into the central premise of the
Thesmophoriazusae gives Aristophanes the opportunity to develop his own comic variation on

2 Henderson (1987) ad loc. argues that this last line is the men’s interpretation of a general Euripidean
sentiment, not a specific quote from any of Euripides’ plays.
the recurring Euripidean theme of the problematic depiction of female ἁγαθοσύνη in drama. It seems likely that Aristophanes is responding not to the sexual aggressiveness of Euripidean heroines, but rather to Euripides’ tendency in plays such as the Hippolytus, Andromache, and Troades to have his characters openly discuss and question the problem of what constitutes tragic female virtue. The Thesmophoriazusae develops this theme further; the behavior of Aristophanes’ own female characters is at the beginning of the play as licentious as Euripides’ worst heroines. However, as Aristophanes appropriates from Euripidean tragedies that portray positive female role models, the attitude of the comedy toward female behavior undergoes a change. The women who are initially depicted as using the Thesmophoria festival as a pretext to conduct illicit activities end the play by celebrating their ritual roles. The play also becomes more self-conscious about the inherently self-contradictory nature of the way in which female ἁγαθοσύνη is defined by their husbands; in the parabasis, the women speak directly to the audience about how the voyeuristic desire of their husbands to catch a forbidden glimpse of women behaving badly directly contradicts their desire to force their wives into good behavior. Aristophanes’ comic variation develops Euripides’ interrogation of the nature of tragic female virtue by adding the problematic element of the relationship between female ἁγαθοσύνη and the male gaze.

Euripides retakes the theme and develops it further in his final masterpiece, the Bacchae, a tragedy performed posthumously in 405 that adopts many of the central themes and motifs of the

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The fact that Aristophanes uses this joke repeatedly should in no way be taken as evidence that he or anyone else truly thought that Euripides was a misogynist, as is assumed by Henderson (2002) 503: “Thesmo, for example, assumes that in 411 B.C., the year of its production, Athenian women were scandalized by the women portrayed in Euripides’ tragedies. Was this mere comic fantasy? Unlikely, in view of the way this assumption is introduced (by male characters) as a given in Lysistrata and the way its effects are debated in Frogs.”

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The play – Bacchae – is a drama that not only takes very seriously the matter and themes of Thesmophoriazusae (religious ritual, gender confusion, cross-dressing, role-playing and theatricality, the troubling and troubled status of women) but transforms the central element of its plot – a man risking his life in order to spy on secret female rites, and dressing up as a woman in order to do so – into the occasion for a profound tragic investigation of the nature of the theater itself, with its paradoxical dynamics of illusion and reality, of true identities revealed through masks. It is in the nature of comedy to assume that parody has the last word, but in the case of Thesmophoriazusae and Bacchae, it was tragedy that laughed last.

Mendelsohn continues, “Even a cursory survey of Bacchae’s themes, characters, and structure suggests how minutely Euripides studied his rival’s play, and how magnificently he transformed it.” The surprisingly large number of similarities and correspondences indicates that Euripides wrote the Bacchae in reaction to the Thesmophoriazusae and as a refashioning of many of its themes and motifs. He appropriates the setting and plot, the characters’ assumptions and motivations, costumes and disguises, religious and metatheatrical concerns, and most of all Aristophanes’ criticisms of Euripides’ recent tragedies.

The next chapter will examine more closely questions of “religious ritual, gender confusion, cross-dressing, role-playing and theatricality.” In this chapter, I focus on the last item of Mendelsohn’s list of “matters and themes” from the Thesmophoriazusae that Euripides uses in

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4 On the quintessentially tragic nature of the plot of the Bacchae, see Chapter 4, pp. 265-9.
5 Mendelsohn (2009) §1.
6 ibid.
7 ibid.
the Bacchae, “the troubling and troubled status of women.” The plots of both plays focus on stopping a man from perpetuating negative stereotypes about female behavior. Just as the women in the Thesmophoriazusae seek to stop Euripides from writing tragedies that portray them in a negative light, Dionysus aims in the Bacchae to stop Pentheus from perpetuating the story that his mother Semele lied about the paternity of her child to cover up her own licentious behavior. Dionysus effects this plan by forcing the people of Thebes into a setting similar to that of the Thesmophoriazusae: he compels the women to leave their homes and segregate themselves on Cithaeron, where they will ultimately exact punishment from Pentheus for his crimes.

Just as the women in the Thesmophoriazusae are angry that Euripides never writes about women who exhibit sôphrosynē, the men in the Bacchae debate whether or not the Bacchants on Cithaeron are sôphrōnes. Through this interrogation of the virtue of the Theban Bacchants, Euripides explores the impossibility of depicting unproblematic female sôphrosynē onstage in light of the conflicting social, religious, and biological pressures that women face. In this nuanced exploration of female sôphrosynē that develops further both his and Aristophanes’ earlier variations on the theme, Euripides creates a paradox that calls into question the entire premise of the Thesmophoriazusae: why should Euripides be criticized for not writing sôphrōnes women when to do so is such a difficult, complicated, even paradoxical task?

I. “He has never written a Penelope” (Thesmophoriazusae 547-8)

The Thesmophoriazusae begins with Euripides dragging his elderly in-law Mnesilochus along as he seeks the aid of Agathon, a much younger contemporary tragedian. Euripides

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8 Although the character has been conventionally named ‘Mnesilochus’, throughout the play he is simply referred to as ‘the in-law’, or κηδεστής. For ease of reference, I will refer to him as Mnesilochus throughout this and the following chapter.
desperately needs to assuage the anger of the women of Athens, who have decided to use the opportunity presented by the Thesmophoria festival to hold a kind of female ecclēsia and vote to execute him (76-84). Their complaint is that Euripides’ adulterous and immoral female characters have taught the men of Athens to be distrustful of their wives and therefore severely limit their freedoms (85). Euripides asks Agathon to infiltrate the Thesmophoria and change the women’s minds by speaking on his behalf (176-92). When Agathon refuses (208), Mnesilochus offers to go in his stead (211-2). Despite an apparently convincing female costume, Mnesilochus outrages the Athenian women with his crudeness and sympathy toward their enemy Euripides, and they discover his true gender (466-650). After attempting to evade capture by acting out a scene from Euripides’ Telephus (689-753), Mnesilochus then sends a signal to Euripides that he is in trouble by using a scheme from Euripides’ Palamedes (765-84). Euripides then ineffectually attempts to rescue Mnesilochus by acting out scenes of escape from some of his most recent tragedies, the Helen and the Andromeda (846-927, 1009-132). Eventually, however, he succeeds in securing both his and Mnesilochus’ safety not by trickery but by bargaining directly with the women and promising not to write about evil female characters anymore (1160-9).

Euripides explains why the women have decided to execute him in these terms:

Εὐριπίδης: αἱ γὰρ γυναῖκες ἐπιβεβουλέωκασί μοι κὰν Θεσμοφόροι μέλλουσι περί μου τήμερον ἐκκλησιάζειν ἐπ’ ὀλέθρῳ.
Κηδεστής: τι ἐδή; ΕΥ: ὁτι τραγῳδῶ καὶ κακῶς αὐτὰς λέγω. 85
KH: νὴ τὸν Ποσειδῶ καὶ δίκαια <γ’> ἂν πάθος. (Thesmo. 82-86)

Euripides: The women have hatched a plot against me, and today at the Thesmophoria they are going to hold an assembly and vote on my execution.
Mnesilochus: Why?
Euripides: Because I portray them in a negative light in my tragedies.
Mnesilochus: Your punishment is well-deserved, by Poseidon!

Euripides never disputes that “κακῶς αὐτὰς λέγω” (85) is a fair assessment, and Mnesilochus goes even further and explicitly agrees that the women have just cause for complaint. The idea that Euripides’ plays are misogynistic works beautifully as the premise of one of Aristophanes’ most clever and amusing comedies. It is, perhaps, a somewhat reductive and oversimplifying view of Euripides’ oeuvre;⁹ any scholar looking seriously at Euripides’ extant works would be hard-pressed to sustain a claim that his treatment of female characters before 411 is uniformly negative.¹⁰ But the *Thesmophoriazusae* is a comedy, not scholarship. As I argued in Chapter 2, there is little evidence to suggest that before the *Acharnians* Euripides was more-than-usually prone to stage heroes in rags, either.¹¹ The fact that the accusation of misogyny is far from the most nuanced possible reading of Euripides’ heroines is not, at first, cause for alarm.

When the women themselves verbalize Euripides’ crime against them, however, their interpretation begins to appear far more problematic:

Μίκα: οὐ γὰρ σε δεί δούναι δύκην; ἦτις μόνη τέληκας ὑπὲρ ἄνδρός ἀντεπεώς ὃς ἦμαι πολλὰ κακὰ δέδρακεν ἐπίτηδες εὐρίσκων λόγους ὅπου γυνὴ πονηρὰ ἐγένετο. Μελανίππας ποῶν Φαίδρας τε: Πηνελόπην δὲ οὐπώποτ᾿ ἐποίησ᾿, ὅτι γυνὴ σώφρων ἔδοξεν εἶναι.
ΚΗ: ἐγὼ γὰρ οἶδα ταῖτων, μάν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴποις τῶν νῦν γυνακῶν Πηνελόπην, Φαίδρας ἐὰν άπαξαπάσασ.  
*(Thesmo. 544-8)*

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⁹ As Austin and Olson (2004) lvi correctly point out, “The Euripides who appears on stage in *Thesmophoriazusae*, in other words, represents not merely a distillation of his own tragedies but a highly tendentious reading of them.”

¹⁰ Although, regrettably, too-literal reading of the *Thesmophoriazusae* has led the perception that Euripides is a misogynist to be more widespread than it deserves. This topic is treated, although perhaps not altogether satisfactorily, in March (1990).

¹¹ See Chapter 2, pp. 86-7.
Mica: Shouldn’t you be punished? You’re the only woman who has dared to speak in defense of the man who has done us wrong, choosing plots with wicked women. He writes Melanippes and Phaedras, but he has never written a Penelope, since she’s known for being chaste.

Mnesilochus: I know the reason for that. You couldn’t call any living woman a Penelope – we’re all Phaedras.

This is a much more specific and problematic complaint than Euripides’ general assessment that he “portrays [women] negatively in his tragedies” (85). It would be easy to dismiss the weakness of the Thesmophoriazusae’s premise as irrelevant, the kind of scholarly nitpicking that has no place in the performative world of the theater. If the comedy wins its competition and makes the audience laugh, why should it matter that its assessment of Euripides’ works is at best an outdated oversimplification? The simple response to this objection is that it is entirely correct that winning the competition and making the audience laugh are indeed the most important functions of this and every other comedy. It is highly suggestive, however, that not only is the Thesmophoriazusae based on a flattening and unsubtle, if not inaccurate, reading of Euripides’ works, but that Aristophanes also chooses here to support that reading with extremely weak evidence.

Mica’s assessment of Euripides’ crimes against women contains two problematic points: the specific choice to single out Melanippe and Phaedra as targets, and the claim that Euripides avoids tragedies that feature women known for their sōphrosynē. Neither of these points can withstand much critical scrutiny. Melanippe and Phaedra are problematic and multifaceted heroines whom Euripides portrayed in very different ways in the multiple tragedies he wrote.

12 Unfortunately, there is no record of whether the Thesmophoriazusae won, although the fact that Aristophanes continued to parody tragedy and Euripides in the Frogs might seem to suggest that he enjoyed a degree of success here.

about them; calling either of them, as Mica does, a γυνὴ πονηρά is a possible interpretation, but hardly the most sensitive one. But even if one accepts this questionable characterization of Phaedra and Melanippe, Mica’s second point still falls short of being convincing, since many of Euripides’ plays do in fact contain female characters who are called sôphrones. The most notable of these are the Alcestis, which is quoted in the Thesmophoriazusae itself, and the Helen, which Aristophanes parodies at length and which contains a heroine who is modeled closely on Penelope and, as I mentioned above, is described as sôphronestatē. Aristophanes appropriates Euripidean texts throughout the play in such a way that it is unlikely that he either did not know or did not care that the characters’ interpretations were so deeply flawed. Instead, it seems that Aristophanes knew that Mica’s claims about Euripides’ tragic representation of women were problematic and chose to subtly underwrite them. Although the Thesmophoriazusae takes as its central premise the idea that Euripides hated women, throughout the play Aristophanes continually presents evidence that contradicts this claim.

Elizabeth Bobrick summarizes the backdrop of the play thus: “Euripides’ plays have taught men to treat their wives as potential Medeas and Phaedras.” Bobrick’s insertion of Medea into the men’s fears is telling but erroneous. Medea, despite seeming to be a perfect γυνὴ πονηρά to support the women’s complaint, is never explicitly mentioned. Only Melanippe and Phaedra are named outright, although Mica also alludes to the behavior of Stheneboea (401-4)

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14 Above, p. 129.
15 Bobrick (1997) 178. Similarly, Mendelsohn (2009) §1 describes the beginning of the play, “As Thesmophoriazusae opens, Euripides has just learned that the women of Athens, incensed at his penchant for portraying ‘bad’ women such as Phaedra and Medea, are using the seclusion afforded by the festival to plot a terrible punishment for him.”
16 The Medea is quoted by Euripides right before he exits the stage after the unsuccessful Andromeda parody. See Chapter 4, pp. 254-5. However, the name of the play is never mentioned, and Medea is never brought forth as an example of an evil Euripidean heroine.
and either Canace or Deidameia (406) without mentioning their names.\footnote{Although Stheneboea’s name does not appear in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, as I mentioned above, she is singled out by name as an example of a Euripidean \textit{pornē} in Aristophanes’ \textit{Frogs} 1043. The fragment from Euripides’ \textit{Stheneboea} is preserved separately in Athenaeus 10.427e; apparently it was a custom, when someone dropped something, to turn away bad luck by proclaiming it as an offering for someone’s health. Cratinus fr. 299.3-4 also mocks this Euripidean line, albeit more crudely: \textit{πίνουσ’ ἀπ’ ἀγκύλης ἐπονόμαζουσα < > / ἔσσει λάταγας τῷ Κορινθίῳ πέει} (“drinking from the ankule, naming it he hurls the dregs ‘to the Corinthian cock!’”). It is unclear, however, to which Euripidean heroine’s paleness \textit{Thesmo}. 406 refers. Sommerstein (1994) \textit{ad loc.} suggests the \textit{Aeolus} or the \textit{Scyrians}, claiming that in the original it was likely a reference to a suspected pregnancy. Austin and Olson (2004) \textit{ad 414-7} argue for a reference to Danae. But aside from the naming of Phaedra and Melanippe and the obvious reference to Stheneboea, none of the other Euripidean evil heroines are pointed out with any clarity, and it is suggestive that Stheneboea, the most shameless and objectionable of the three, is also the one whose name is elided.} This brief list omits many of the women who might seem to be more obvious choices, including not only Medea but also Ino, Althaea, and Clytemnestra, all of whom were featured in Euripidean plays performed before the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} was staged in 411.\footnote{Ino is mentioned in the \textit{Acharnians}, and therefore certainly predates the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}. Althaea’s role in bringing about the death of Meleager would certainly have been a focus of Euripides’ \textit{Meleager}, dated to within a few years after 419 by Collard and Cropp based on metrical evidence; see Collard and Cropp (2008) 616-7. The date of the \textit{Electra} is unknown, but it is certain to have predated the \textit{Helen}.} In the \textit{Acharnians}, by contrast, a fairly large number of Euripidean heroes in rags are mentioned, including Oeneus, Phoenix, Philoctetes, Bellerophon, and Telephus. No such comprehensive and persuasive list is included in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} to support the claim of misogyny.

Furthermore, Melanippe and Phaedra are particularly problematic heroines to single out because Euripides wrote two plays about each with widely differing depictions of the characters. Additionally, the versions that were almost certainly the more recent ones featured versions of Phaedra and Melanippe that were comparatively virtuous. Euripides wrote the \textit{Melanippe the Wise} (\textit{Μελανίππη ἡ Σοφή}) and \textit{Melanippe Desmotis} about Melanippe, and the \textit{Hippolytus}...
Kalypomenos and Hippolytus Stephanophoros about Phaedra.\textsuperscript{19} From what little is known about the Melanippe plays, in the Melanippe the Wise, the heroine attempted to conceal the birth of her twin sons, the product of her rape or seduction by Poseidon, by hiding them in the stable. When the twins were discovered, Melanippe’s father Aeolus decided to kill them, believing them to be the unnatural human offspring of a cow. Melanippe then presented the logical argument to Aeolus that it was far more likely that the children had been abandoned by their mother. At some point, her deception was revealed, and Melanippe’s mother Hippe (or Hippo) was forced to intervene to prevent Aeolus from taking violent action against Melanippe and her sons.\textsuperscript{20} Metrical evidence dates the play to around 420.\textsuperscript{21} Although Melanippe does not seem to have been portrayed as lustful, one can perhaps understand why the women in the Thesmophoriazusae would have found this heroine problematic, and in fact Aristotle agreed with their assessment, calling her speech ‘unfitting’.\textsuperscript{22} In the Melanippe Desmotis, however, the title character appears to have been a far less assertive and deceitful figure. The plot of that play revolved around an attempt by Siris to murder Melanippe’s sons, who were her stepsons. Melanippe’s sons somehow discovered their true identity and then proceeded to free their mother from captivity.\textsuperscript{23} In fact, Melanippe’s most significant action in the play seems to have been an impassioned defense of the

\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps ironically, this play that mentions two rewritten heroines was itself also rewritten. Very little is known for certain about the lost Thesmophoriazusae, including whether it was performed before or after the extant one; Butrica (2001b) and (2004) argues for a date close to 423, while Austin and Olson (2003-4) and (2004) lxxiv-lxxxvii argue that the terminus post quem for the play is 416 and it was likely performed after the extant comedy. Karachalios (2006) argues strongly in favor of the 423 date.

\textsuperscript{20} Collard and Cropp (2008) 569-571.

\textsuperscript{21} ibid. 571.

\textsuperscript{22} Poetics 1454a: ἔστιν δὲ παράδειγμα ποιημάτων μὲν ἦθους μὴ ἀναγκαίας οἷον ὁ Μενέλαος ὁ ἐν τῷ Ὀρέστῃ, τοῦ δὲ ἀπερεποῦς καὶ μὴ ἀρμότοτος ὁ τε θρῆνος Ὅδυσσεως ἐν τῇ Σκύλλῃ καὶ ἡ τῆς Μελανίππης ῥήσις… (an example of unnecessary evilness of character is Menelaus in the Orestes. An example of a character that is unfitting and unsuitable is the lament of Odysseus in the Scylla or the speech of Melanippe…)

female gender – a speech which, one would think, would endear her (and Euripides) to the women in this play, rather than position Melanippe as the epitome of an evil woman.\textsuperscript{24}

The third-century biographer Satyrus, recognizing that the Melanippe from the \textit{Desmotis} does not fit the complaint of the women in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, sought to resolve the apparent contradiction between her positive representation and the women’s claim in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} that Euripides had never written about a \textit{sóphrón} woman by hypothesizing that the \textit{Desmotis} was written after Euripides’ bargain with the women of Athens not to write about evil women anymore.\textsuperscript{25} However, there is no reason to believe that the pact made between Euripides and the women of Athens in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} was in any way a reflection of actual historical events; the tendency of ancient biographers to use Aristophanes’ comedies as evidence has been well documented.\textsuperscript{26} I believe that Satyrus’ chronology and causation are both reversed. The plot of the \textit{Desmotis} seems to fit remarkably well into the mold of the Euripidean escape-tragedies of the late 410’s, showing striking similarities to the \textit{Iphigeneia in Tauris}, \textit{Helen}, and \textit{Andromeda}.\textsuperscript{27} The performance of the play, therefore, is likely to predate the

\textsuperscript{24} P. Berlin 9772 = fr. 494 Nauck. Melanippe ends her speech (23-9) by admitting that there is nothing worse than a bad woman, but also by claiming that there is nothing better than a good one; she also argues that the badness of one woman should not be the basis for denigration of the entire gender. For the possible reception of this speech in Aristophanes’ \textit{Ecclesiazusae}, see Butrica (2001a).

\textsuperscript{25} This fragment of Satyrus is preserved in P. Oxy. 1176.

\textsuperscript{26} Lefkowitz (1981) 87: “Close analysis again shows that most of the original source material for the \textit{Vita} was comedy or Euripides’ own dramas.” However, she later notes more sympathetically (p. 103), “Ultimately, perhaps, the most valuable lesson we can learn from the study of the Euripides \textit{Vita} is that today we have very little historical information about the poet’s life, other than his approximate dates. We do not know anything about his motives for writing, his personal religious beliefs or lack of them, or his actual relationship with the Athenians or their collective or individual assessments of him. In reality we are in no better position than Satyrus or any other ancient biographer, since we must also deduce from his surviving words virtually all that we can know about him.”

\textsuperscript{27} Although Metapontium was not as exotic a location as the Black Sea, Egypt, or Ethiopia, it was still a fairly unusual setting for a play, and the rescue of the bound and captive Melanippe by her sons fits perfectly into the escape-tragedy model, as does the apparent Poseidon \textit{deus ex machina} etiology that appears to have ended the play; see Collard and Cropp (2008) 588.
*Thesmophoriazusae*, which seems to acknowledge the trend in Euripides’ recent tragedies toward this type of escape-plot with an unobjectionable heroine. It has even been argued that the *Desmotis* was the third play that filled out an escape-trilogy along with the *Helen* and *Andromeda* in 412. The evidence suggests that Aristophanes’ comic bargain between Euripides and the women of Athens was not the precursor to a change in Euripides’ representation of female characters, as Satyrus thought, but instead a retroactive attempt by Aristophanes to claim ownership for a change that had already been taking place for the past few years.

The two *Hippolytus* plays are remarkably parallel to the two *Melanippe* plays in their representation of Phaedra. Although the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* could be complaining about the Phaedra from our extant *Hippolytus* (sometimes called the *Hippolytus Stephanias* or *Stephanephoros*), in the canon of tragic Phaedras she is one of the chastest. In the extant *Hippolytus*, Phaedra never actively seeks to have an affair with her son-in-law and is horrified to learn that her nurse approached him on her behalf (*Hippolytus* 682-94). Although Phaedra becomes indirectly responsible for Hippolytus’ death when she commits suicide and leaves a note claiming falsely that he had raped her, she is certainly not portrayed as being as sexually aggressive as she was in Euripides’ lost *Hippolytus* play, sometimes called the *Kalyptomenos*.

Unfortunately, this conjecture can only ever be speculative, although the fact that the *Melanippe Desmotis* is possibly quoted by Eupolis in his *Demes* (412), along with the references made here, might suggest that the play had been performed within recent memory. Zacharia (2003) 3-7 suggests instead that the *Ion* was the third play performed in 412.
because Hippolytus covered his head in shame when Phaedra boldly propositioned him.  

Furthermore, the Phaedra in the extant *Hippolytus* is obsessively concerned with her own *sôphrosynê*: she tells the chorus, “I hate women who are chaste in word alone, secretly possessing dishonorable daring” (μισῶ δὲ καὶ τὰς σώφρονας μὲν ἐν λόγοις, / λάθρᾳ δὲ τὸλμας οὐ καλὰς κεκτημένας, *Hippolytus* 413-4). The Nurse claims that Phaedra’s lack of chastity is to blame for the situation:

(\[ \begin{align*}
\text{OUNDS } & \text{TACHOS } \text{DIUSTEON}, \\
& \text{TON EIDHON } \text{EKSIPONTAS } \text{AMPHI } \text{SOU } \text{LOGON}. \\
& \text{EI } \text{MEN } \text{GAR } \text{HN } \text{SOI } \text{MI } \text{PI } \text{SUMFORAIS } \text{BIOS} \\
& \text{TOMAIDE } \text{SOFROI } \text{OUP } \text{ETUNICHANES } \text{NIH}, \\
& \text{OIK } \text{AN } \text{POT } \text{EUNHS } \text{OUNEX } \text{HDONHS } \text{TE } \text{SIS} \\
& \text{PROHGOAN } \text{AN } \text{SE } \text{DEURO}.
\end{align*} \])  

(*Hippolytus* 491-6)

You must learn as quickly as possible the straightforward truth about yourself: if your life had not come to such misfortune, if you happened to be a chaste woman, I would not have led you here for the sake of sexual pleasure.

But Phaedra rejects this interpretation entirely, along with the Nurse’s plan to convince Hippolytus to have sex with her. Although her desires betray a lack of perfect inner *sôphrosynê*, Phaedra remains firm in her resolve to act, as far as is possible, in a manner befitting of a *sôphrôn* woman.

If the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* are complaining not about the extant, conflicted Phaedra but about the more licentious Phaedra from the *Kalyptomenos*, we must conclude that

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29 Cowan (2008) 317-8. Cowan also argues that the disguised Mnesilochus’ description of “her” lover running away with his head veiled (*Thesmo*. 497-501) immediately after asking why it should matter if Euripides writes an evil Phaedra is meant to recall the *Kalyptomenos*. Roisman (1999) argues that in the *Kalyptomenos* Phaedra and Hippolytus do sleep together and Hippolytus veils himself in shame after, not because of her sexual advances. Although Cowan’s argument about Mnesilochus’ speech seems highly implausible, Roisman’s reconstruction makes it slightly more likely, because the imagined scene in the *Thesmophoriazusae* would have resembled the Euripidean original more closely.
both *Hippolytus* plays had already been written, because Mnesilochus clearly references the extant *Stephanephoros* early in the *Thesmophoriazusae* when he forces Euripides to swear to come to his rescue if the stratagem fails: “Just remember that your mind has sworn, not your tongue. I don’t pay much heed to that kind of oath” (μέμνησο τοίνυν ταῦθ’, ὅτι ἡ φρὴν ὠμοσεν, / ἡ γλῶττα δ’ οὐκ ὀμώμοκ’, οὐδ’ ὀφρκωσ’ ἐγὼ, 275-6).30 This line is a direct reminiscence of a line from the extant *Hippolytus*, “My tongue swore, but my mind is unsworn” (ἡ γλῶσσ᾽ ὀμώμοχ’, ἡ δὲ φρὴν ἀνώμοτος, 612).31 Although the relative dating of the two plays is uncertain, most scholars agree that the extant *Hippolytus* is the later of the two.32 Therefore it seems that Euripides had already rewritten his sexually forward Phaedra into a less objectionable version who was deeply concerned with maintaining some semblance of *sōphrosynē*. All of Aristophanes’

30 Hutchinson (2004) 26-7 argues that it was normal for the second of two homonymous plays to contain many allusions to the earlier play in such a way as to reflect on its indebtedness to and difference from its predecessor. In this formulation, the second would be a self-conscious ‘rewrite’ of the first. Hutchinson is one of few who claims that the extant *Hippolytus* is the earlier one.

31 The quotation itself is also problematic and misleading when considered in its original Euripidean context. Clearly Mnesilochus is quoting the *Hippolytus* in order to close a loophole that he fears Euripides will try to use to keep from having to rescue him if their plan goes awry. But although the quotation sounds like a piece of slippery sophistry when taken out of context, those familiar with the *Hippolytus* would know that Hippolytus did in fact keep his oath, even when doing so and not revealing the truth to his father Theseus meant his own death; see Torrance (2009) 2-4. Sommerstein (1994) *ad loc.* claims that “audiences remembered the line out of context, and took it as a clever (and, it was alleged, typically Euripidean) excuse and justification for perjury.” However, his only evidence for this interpretation is the parody of the same line in the *Frogs*, where Dionysus does in fact use the idea that only his tongue swore to go back on his oath to save Euripides and take Aeschylus instead. Goldhill (1990) 219 points out that this is the ultimate insult against Euripides: to use his own line to justify preferring another tragedian. But since this evidence also comes from Aristophanes, it can hardly be taken as representative of the entire audience. Although the line superficially seems to mock Euripides for his sophistic tendencies, the mockery loses its sting when one realizes that the Euripidean original hardly deserves to be accused of encouraging perjury.

32 The basis of this consensus is the hypothesis of the extant *Hippolytus*, probably written by Aristophanes of Byzantium, which claims that what was inappropiate in the first version has been corrected (29-30). Gibert (1997) attempts to “replace dogma with appropriate skepticism” (86). He does not, however, go so far as to argue that the lost play was written second. McDermott (2000) follows the traditional order and argues that several passages in the extant play signal that they are revisionary. See also W. Barrett (1964) 10-45.
characters ignore the existence of this more recent Phaedra completely.\textsuperscript{33}

Phaedra is mentioned one other time in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, seemingly offhand.

When Agathon is explaining his reasons for engaging in his overblown kind of mimesis to aid in his composition,\textsuperscript{34} Mnesilochus asks, "So I suppose you like to be on top when you write a Phaedra?" (οὐκοὖν κελητίζεις, ὅταν Φαίδραν ποῇς; 153). It is unclear whether he is referring to any specific dramatic depiction of Phaedra; more likely he is thinking about the character’s general reputation from mythology. While making this seemingly throwaway comment, however, Mnesilochus inadvertently points toward an extremely relevant observation: it would be entirely normal for Agathon to write a Phaedra. Sophocles certainly did.\textsuperscript{35} Why, then, is Euripides targeted in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} for his choice to write about such a commonly depicted character, particularly when his most recent portrayal of her was comparatively virtuous?

Melanippe and Phaedra, therefore, are unusual, problematic heroines to select as the best evidence that Euripides only stages tragedies with wicked female characters. In fact, Melanippe and Phaedra seem to be better proof that the historic Euripides was deeply interested in the motivations and characterization of women in his plays and therefore chose to explore multiple different viewpoints on the same characters in the same myths. The most sensible conclusion to draw from the appropriation of Euripidean texts in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} is not that Euripides writes about only evil women, but that he seems overly fixated on female characters and the

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\textsuperscript{33} More recent, but still hardly as \textit{kainē} as Euripides’ \textit{Helen}. The fact that the extant \textit{Hippolytus} is securely dated to 428 implies that the more scandalous version of Phaedra may have been very old indeed, perhaps even less recent than the \textit{Telephus}.

\textsuperscript{34} For more on this scene and Agathon’s mimesis, see Chapter 4, pp. 200-11.

\textsuperscript{35} Although almost nothing is known about this lost \textit{Phaedra} aside from the fact that it existed; see W. Barrett (1964) 12-13.
female experience in general. Euripides’ heroines are not so much evil as they are complex and multifaceted. Had Aristophanes wished to make a stronger case for Euripides’ misogyny, he certainly could have found other, less problematic heroines to single out. At the very least, he could have avoided heroines about whom Euripides had more recently written plays painting them in a sympathetic light.

Mica’s complaint (554-8) has two facets. The first is that Euripides deliberately seeks out plots that feature evil women, such as Melanippe and Phaedra. As we have seen, this claim is, if not completely false, then certainly not as simple as it first appears. The second part of her complaint is that Euripides also deliberately avoids plots that feature good women known for their sōphrosynē, such as Penelope. This statement is even more complicated and problematic than the first, since many Euripidean tragedies engage deeply with the concept of female virtue. As I mentioned above, in the extant Hippolytus Phaedra and her nurse debate her claim to sōphrosynē. Similarly, in Euripides’ Andromache, the heroine and her nemesis Hermione argue with each other about which woman has the right to be called sōphrōn: during the ἀγών,

Hermione asks Andromache, “Why do you take such a high and mighty tone and enter into a contest of words, saying that you are virtuous and I am not?” (τί σεμνομυθεῖς κἀς ἀγῶν’ ἔρχῃ λόγων, / ὡς δὴ σὺ σώφρων, τὰμὰ δ‘ οὐχὶ σώφρονα; Andromache 234-5). Mica’s assessment flattens the nuance of these interrogations of the difficulty of defining female virtue by recasting

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36 Mastronarde (2010) 246 argues that “Euripidean plays in particular (both surviving and lost) contain a greater number of major female roles, they more frequently explore domestic and personal themes, and they show a pervasive engagement with contemporary intellectual trends, among which was the provocative analysis of nature and culture and the questioning of accepted norms, including those pertaining to gender.”

37 Peleus also speculates at Andromache 594-601 that the Spartan way of life makes it impossible for women to be chaste. On the Andromache, see Boulter (1966) 54. The misogynistic undertones of the Andromache would seem to make it a natural target for complaint in the Thesmophoriazusae, although it is not mentioned.
Euripides as a writer of whores.

Furthermore, sōphrosynē is often a difficult term to access the meaning of. In their in-depth studies of sōphrosynē, Helen North and Adriaan Rademaker point out that it is one of the most challenging Greek virtues to define, a notoriously slippery concept for which the meaning is always heavily context-dependent. Euripides seems on occasion to take advantage of the multiple possible shades of meaning in the word, especially in the Hippolytus. As I mentioned above, Phaedra objects to the Nurse’s characterization of her as lacking in chastity. However, she also acknowledges that she is not entirely in control of her emotions, admitting that she tried and failed to conquer her passion for Hippolytus with self-control (τὸ δὲύτερον δὲ τὴν ἄνοιαν εὖ φέρειν / τῷ σωφρονεῖν νικῶσα πρωνοησάμην, Hippolytus 398-9). Hippolytus acknowledges this contradiction in obscure, riddling language when he tells Theseus that Phaedra “did what was virtuous when virtue could not be hers” (ἔσωφρόνησε δ᾽ οὐκ ἔχουσα σωφρονεῖν, 1034).

Another reason why it is so difficult to translate sōphrosynē is that the word has distinctly different sets of meanings for both genders. For men, it usually denotes prudence and restraint, while for women sōphrosynē often refers to modesty and chastity. The women who are called sōphrones are, most frequently, those who voluntarily conceal themselves within their homes and remain silent, a formulation best expressed by Andromache in Euripides’ Troades:

Sōphrosynē has been the subject of two monographs, North (1966) and Rademaker (2005), both of which reach this conclusion. North (1948) argues that the word sōphrosynē can mean anything from ‘sanity’ to ‘prudence’ or ‘good sense’ or ‘moderation’ or ‘restraint’ or ‘chastity’ or even ‘good taste’ (in the context of literary criticism).

Trans. Barrett (1964) ad loc. In his commentary, Barrett admirably explains Hippolytus’ riddle: “what Ph. could not do was keep her passion continuously subdued (σωφρονεῖν present: being unable to be σώφρων), what she did was to perform a single act (ἔσωφρόνησε aor.), her suicide, that subdued it once for all.”

North (1977) 35.

Rademaker (2005). The exception, of course, is Hippolytus, who repeatedly claims to be the chastest man alive (Hippolytus 994-5, 1100-1, 1365).
ἃ γὰρ γυναιξὶ σώφρον᾽ ἔσθ᾽ ἡπρημένα, 645
ταῦτ᾽ ἔξεμόχθουν Ἄκτορος κατὰ στέγας.
πρῶτον μὲν, ἐνθα – κἂν προσῆ κἂν μὴ προσῆ
ψόγοις γυναιξίν – αὐτὸ τοῦτ᾽ ἐφέλκεται
κακῶς ἀκούειν, ἥτις οὐκ ἔνδον μένει,
τοῦτον παρείσα πόθον ἔξωμυν ἐν δόμωις:
ἐσωτερικὰ σιγὴν ὀμμαθ᾽ ἥσυχον πόσει
παρείσα ἤδη ἢ ᾗ ἔχρην νυκάν πόσιν
κεῖνῳ τε νίκην ὧν ἔχρην παρείσα.

(Troades 645-56)

Whatever is considered virtuous for a woman, I toiled to do in Hector’s home. First, whether a woman is criticized or not, not remaining in the house brings ill repute, so I suppressed my desire to leave and stayed inside. And I did not allow womanly gossip into my home, but instead contented myself with an honest mind. I offered my husband a silent tongue and a peaceful eye, and I knew how to pick my battles with him.

Similar definitions of female virtue are common throughout Greek literature. It is unclear to what extent this conception of sōphrosynē was meant as an ideal to aspire to rather than a goal achievable for contemporary Athenian women; regardless, within the world of tragedy, the idea that women should remain indoors is a recurring theme. In Aeschylus’ Seven Against Thebes,
Eteocles tells the chorus, “It is the province of men to offer sacrifices to the gods before making an attack on the enemy; your duty is to stay silent and remain inside the house” (ἀνδρῶν τάδ᾽ ἐστί, σφάγια καὶ χρηστήρια / θεοῖσιν ἐρδεῖν πολεμίων πειρομένους: / σὸν δ᾽ αὖ τὸ σιγᾶν καὶ μένειν εἴσω δόμων, Septem 230-2).43

Following these prescriptions for the virtue of women, it is nearly impossible for a tragic heroine to be fully sōphrōn. She must exit her home, the skēnē, in order to participate in the action of the play, and in doing so she is already transgressive. Furthermore, tragic heroines who have succeeded in being such excellent wives that they may boast about their sōphrosynē would seem to flaunt the admonition that women should remain silent. Nevertheless, North argues – entirely contrary to the claim of the women in the Thesmophoriazusae – that women who are sōphrones are not uncommon in Euripidean tragedy, although they are rarely the heroines.44 The only context in which North allows for the possibility of an unproblematically sōphrōn tragic heroine is in the case of extremely self-sacrificing female characters such as Alcestis, Iphigeneia, or Polyxena.45 Other tragic heroines such as the Helen of Euripides’ Helen or Andromache in the Troades and Andromache may ultimately earn the right to be called sōphrōn through their actions, but only after extensive debate and self-justification.

Many of the Euripidean plays quoted either briefly or at length in the Thesmophoriazusae are the ones that contain women who are described within their own plays as sōphrones.

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43 Eteocles’ emphasis on the word ἀνδρῶν suggests that it is the gender of the chorus, not their social status, that conditions his remark.
44 North (1977) 39-40: “Women specifically characterized as possessing sōphrosynē are not uncommon in Euripidean tragedy, sometimes maidens, more often wives (since perpetual virginity is not a Greek ideal, except for certain goddesses, and then for special, often very complex historical circumstances). In either condition, they are noted for quiet, inconspicuous behavior and obedience to father, husband, or other kyrios, as well as for chastity. They are not, for the most part, protagonists in their tragedies, since for women, as for men, to be capable of sōphrosynē is to be relegated to secondary rôles…”
45 Ibid. 40.
Although the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* mention a few ‘evil’ women by name, the Euripidean texts from which Aristophanes appropriates lines and scenes are not only or even predominantly those which the women complain about. In fact, the reverse seems to be the case: some of Euripides’ most blameless, even exemplary female characters are referred to, either directly or obliquely. With Melanippe and Phaedra, Aristophanes has suggestively omitted any mention of Euripides’ rewrites; the evidence needed to counter Mica’s point about Euripides’ lack of heroines who display sōphrosynē, on the other hand, is embedded into the text of the *Thesmophoriazusae* itself. No external knowledge of Euripides’ works would have been necessary for an astute viewer to understand that the interpretation of his tragedies taken for granted by every character in the play is intrinsically flawed.

Two of the Euripidean plays that are parodied extensively within the *Thesmophoriazusae* itself – the *Helen* and the *Andromeda* – contain laudable heroines who on their own would be sufficient counter-evidence to call the women’s complaint into question. The titular heroines of these recent escape-tragedies comprise two different complementary paradigms of virtuous womanhood. Andromeda is a sacrificial virgin rescued (and eventually married) by the hero Perseus; although most of the *Andromeda* has not survived, it seems unlikely that she would have been the kind of heroine about whom the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* were complaining. Helen, meanwhile, is willing to go to extreme lengths to maintain her fidelity to her absent husband Menelaus, even vowing to commit suicide if she is forced to marry Theoclymenus.46 Throughout the *Helen*, Menelaus and Helen are subtly but extensively assimilated to Odysseus and Penelope in the *Odyssey*. Menelaus’ arrival after a shipwreck, along with his use of a beggar

46 Although some scholars have doubted Helen’s genuineness when she claims to be willing to go to these extremes. See, for instance, Papi (1987) 34-7, Schmiel (1972).
costume to gain admittance into Theoclymenus’ palace, are strongly Odyssean touches.

Therefore, while the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* might be technically correct that Euripides had never written a play about Penelope herself, he had just the year before written a play about a Helen with remarkable similarities to Penelope. In fact, the portrayal of a Helen who is chaste and faithful is arguably even more powerful than that of a Penelope, whose name was practically synonymous with marital fidelity. It is far more striking to turn Helen, mythology’s paradigmatic sexually promiscuous woman, into a faithful wife. The audience may well have been shocked by the virtuousness of the heroine of the *Helen*, considering the extreme contrast between her and the far more traditional Helen in Euripides’ *Troades*, a play performed only a few years earlier in 415.

Helen’s faithfulness and her bond with her husband Menelaus in the *Helen* are acted out onstage in the *Thesmophoriazusae* by Euripides and Mnesilochus in a long parody (850–919). In the parodic version of the scene, ‘Helen’/Mnesilochus wants nothing more than to be reunited with her ‘husband’/Euripides and escape with him. The character who emerges from Aristophanes’ manipulations of the *Helen* is arguably more blameless even than Euripides’ original. Some scholars have been unconvinced that Euripides’ Helen is truly the completely faithful wife she claims to be, noting her unsettling cleverness and ease with deception. Her scheming parallels and equals that of Melanippe, who has already been deemed objectionable by the women in Aristophanes’ play. But in his parody, Aristophanes smooths over anything that

47 For more similarities between the *Odyssey* and the *Helen*, see Chapter 2, p. 84, n. 10.
48 The brief interchange between Mica and Mnesilochus could be considered proof that Penelope epitomized wifely virtue for the Athenian audience, since her name was the first to come to mind.
50 Pucci (1997) 44 argues that her chastity is the result of chance more than virtue, because if Hera had not intervened she certainly would have gone with Paris to Troy. Blondell (2013) 202–21 argues that Euripides maintains Helen’s characteristic traits but puts them in service of virtue rather than vice.
might have been problematic or uncomfortable in the tragedy, turning Helen into a woman who is entirely passive and compliant and plays almost no role in her own rescue.\textsuperscript{51} Similarly, the \textit{Andromeda} parody turns Andromeda into a passive object of Perseus’ love, omitting the parts of the tragedy where Andromeda boldly offers herself to Perseus as either a wife or a concubine if he saves her (frr. 129 and 132) and exhibits defiance toward her father when she chooses to leave with Perseus and marry him.\textsuperscript{52} Despite her status as a sacrificial virgin, Andromeda’s behavior might have had subtly problematic undertones.\textsuperscript{53} In the parody scene, however, no such complexity is evident: ‘Andromeda’ is nearly silent in the presence of ‘Perseus’. These alterations fit the circumstances within the plot of the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} better while simultaneously undermining the play’s central premise that Euripides only represents women in a negative light. When Mnesilochus plays the roles of Helen and Andromeda, he does not only use Euripidean plots to attempt to escape from his captors; he also implicitly (albeit unconsciously) proves the unfairness of the women’s complaint.\textsuperscript{54}

The \textit{Andromeda} and the \textit{Helen} are not the only plays that Aristophanes references in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} that seem to contradict the play’s basic premise. Some of the one-line

\textsuperscript{51} Revermann (2006b) 115-6: “The \textit{Helen} and \textit{Andromeda} parodies both rely heavily on flattening Euripidean complexities.” See also Foley (2008) 23-4.

\textsuperscript{52} Attested in Eratosthenes’ \textit{Catasterisms} 17; see also Gibert (1999-2000) 82-3. Gibert argues that \textit{erōs} in the \textit{Andromeda} is primarily romantic, not sexual, and that the humor of the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} parody rests on the difference between how Euripides/Perseus defines \textit{erōs} and how the Scythian Archer understands him. Gibert notes with regret (pp. 90-1) that the remaining fragments of the play do not give any idea of whether Andromeda was also in love with Perseus; if she was, her feelings may also have been a problematic element. In the \textit{Frogs}, Aeschylus boasts of never having written about a woman in love (οὐδ᾽ οἶδ᾽ οὐδὲς ἤμετρ᾽ ἐρώσαν πῶσον ἐποίησα γυναῖκα, \textit{Frogs} 1044). This is not an accurate characterization; Hypermnestra in Aeschylus’ Danaid trilogy is generally thought to have been motivated by love to save her husband. Nevertheless, it suggests that female \textit{erōs} in tragedy was problematic.

\textsuperscript{53} Gibert (1999-2000) argues that tragedies about love are relatively rare, which might have led to the popularity of the \textit{Andromeda}.

\textsuperscript{54} Foley (2008) 23: “Even Euripides’ turn to recent dramas featuring virtuous women, \textit{Helen} and \textit{Andromeda}, makes no impression on the play’s internal audiences.”
quotations and brief mentions of Euripides’ works throughout the play also give the impression that Aristophanes knew his accusation of misogyny was unfair and deliberately selected references that would keep the most educated members of the audience from complacently accepting the women’s analysis. Very early in the play, after Euripides describes his problem to Agathon and begs for the younger tragedian’s help, Agathon refuses by quoting one of Euripides’ own works, “Did you once write, ‘you rejoice looking at the light of the sun, so do you not think your father does as well?’” (ἐποίησάς ποτε, ‘χαίρεις όρῶν φῶς, πατέρα δ’ οὐ χαίρειν δοκεῖς; 193-4) Agathon does not name the tragedy from which he drew this quotation, but some members of the audience might have recognized that it originally came from Euripides’ Alcestis, a play remarkable for depicting a heroine who is such a devoted wife that she agrees to die in her husband Admetus’ place when even his own elderly father Pheres refused. In fact, Agathon is here quoting Pheres’ justification of his choice not to die for his son. Throughout the play, Alcestis’ sōphrosynē is emphasized; Alcestis herself says to Admetus, “Some other woman will possess you, not more temperate, but luckier” (σὲ δ’ ἄλλη τις γυνὴ κεκτήσεται, / σώφρων μὲν οὐκ ἄν μᾶλλον, εὔτυχῆς δ’ ἰσῶς, Alcestis 181-2), implying that no woman more sōphrōn than herself exists.  

55 Alcestis is therefore an excellent argument against the idea that Euripides never wrote a woman who was “known for her sōphrosynē” (Thesmo. 548).

Throughout the play that bears her name, Alcestis is heralded repeatedly as the very model of an exemplary wife, the best who has ever lived or ever will live. Perhaps the women in the Thesmophoriazusae might have claimed, just as plausibly, that Euripides’ overly idealistic depiction of wifehood in the character of Alcestis had led their husbands to have unrealistically  %

55 Mastronarde (2010) 270 argues, following Foley (2001) 315-6, that the sōphrosynē of Alcestis serves for her almost as an aristeia, a competition between the sexes that she wins on behalf of all women. By quoting Pheres, Agathon would seem to rehash the failure of his entire gender.
high standards for their behavior. Regardless, Alcestis’ name is never mentioned as a counter-argument, by Euripides or any other character. But if Aristophanes truly meant for her to be entirely irrelevant, why would he quote the Alcestis in such a marked way, by having Agathon draw attention to the fact that he is citing one of Euripides’ own plays and purposely using Euripides’ own words against him? The fact that the line is singled out as a quotation might naturally lead some members of the audience to try to recall its origin.

When all of this evidence is considered together – the confusing and problematic singling out of Melanippe and Phaedra as the worst of Euripides’ heroines, the portrayal of blameless models of wifehood in the parodies of the Helen and Andromeda, and the quotation of the Alcestis – a convincing picture emerges. Aristophanes filled the Thesmophoriazusae with references that prove that Euripides portrayed female characters positively as well as negatively. Not only is the women’s complaint against Euripides unfair, but Aristophanes also undermines it further throughout the play by repeatedly (albeit subtly) bringing contradictory evidence to light. This conflict is characteristic of Aristophanes: as Matthew Wright cautions, “We need to bear in mind the prevalence of irony in Aristophanes and his tendency to contradict his own claims.”

But the extent of the self-contradiction in the Thesmophoriazusae is striking: the central premise of the play is proven by the play itself to be an exaggeration. The subtle conflict of the avowed assessment of Euripides’ misogyny with the invocation of several virtuous Euripidean heroines recapitulates Euripides’ own repeated exploration of the problems inherent in any attempt to depict female virtue on the tragic stage.

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56 Wright (2013) 214.
II. “You see, Euripides never mentioned that!” (Thesmophoriazusae 490)

Mica’s complaint about Euripides is that he writes Melanippes and Phaedras, and Mnesilochus’ response is that all women alive are Phaedras (547-50). As I have shown, Mica’s statement is essentially true, but also misleading. Euripides has indeed written Melanippes and Phaedras, and the use of the plural is appropriate because he had written multiple plays about each character with widely varying depictions of the title characters. Mnesilochus’ response is also accurate: the women in the Thesmophoriazusae are indeed Phaedras. But they are Euripidean Phaedras, which is to say, women who confront and challenge the problematic definitions of female sôphrosynê in drama.

As Froma Zeitlin argues, Mnesilochus attempts to understand the actions of the women within a typical comic paradigm of female behavior:

...the anecdotes he tells of adultery and supposititious babies come straight out of the typical male discourse of the comic theater (476-519). The women he depicts as overly fond of wine and sex conform to the portrait of the comic woman, who displays her unruly Dionysiac self, even in this play, in the spirit of carnival and misrule. As the comic male character in the comic play, the kinsman is only playing true to form.57

This “typical male discourse of the comic theater” stands out in a play otherwise full of generic hybridity. Throughout the Thesmophoriazusae, Aristophanes either refers to or replicates through parody the behavior of many Euripidean heroines, including Melanipe, Phaedra, Helen, and Andromeda. As I have argued, the former two women are complex and problematic,

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57 Zeitlin (1981) 305; she continues, “And if he defends the tragic poet in the comic way, he makes ‘unspeakable’ what comedy has always claimed as its right to speak. Is tragedy taking the fall for comedy? Is the kinsman’s defense, in fact, the defense mounted by comedy against the trespass on its ground by Euripidean tragedy?” Although Zeitlin does not answer these rhetorical questions, I am not certain that they should be answered in the affirmative; as I have argued, Aristophanes depicts Euripides’ heroines as more lascivious than they are, exaggerating Euripides’ “trespass”.

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while the latter pair are portrayed as passive and virtuous. Not all of the female behavior in the play fits into Mnesilochus’ simple comic paradigm. Instead, the depiction of women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* seems to evolve over the course of the play.

The women who seek to execute Euripides, we soon discover, are just as untrustworthy as their husbands fear they are. However, despite the ample discussion throughout the play of female misbehavior, calling the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* wicked would be nearly as reductive as calling Euripides a misogynist. The *Thesmophoriazusae* may depict the depths of female vice, but it is also ultimately sympathetic to the extreme difficulty that women face when they attempt to behave virtuously. The chorus seems at first to be composed of adulteresses with insatiable appetites for sex and wine. However, a shift occurs at the parabasis, where the women are given the opportunity to voice their grievances about the contradictions inherent in how they are treated by their husbands, who claim to want virtuous wives but secretly hope to catch them misbehaving. Following the parabasis is a succession of parodies of Euripidean plays that feature virtuous heroines. Finally, the play that began with women who admit to using the Thesmophoria as a pretext to get drunk ends with the chorus singing a hymn to Demeter and Persephone, celebrating the festival in a relatively appropriate manner.

In this complex depiction of female behavior, the *Thesmophoriazusae* is similar to the *Lysistrata*, another female-focused comedy that Aristophanes produced the same year, and also

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58 Sommerstein (1977) argues that the *Lysistrata* would most likely have been performed first, in the Lenaia, with the *Thesmophoriazusae* following a few months later in the Great Dionysia. Henderson (1987) xxviii and nn. 3-4 notes that while female choruses were not uncommon in comedy, there is no extant example of a comic heroine before the *Lysistrata* and that even female speaking parts were relatively rare. These two comedies, then, about women attempting to solve issues that concern their gender, may have been some of the first to focus so entirely on female concerns. Furthermore, he argues that the representation in the *Lysistrata* of domestic concerns is far more realistic than one might expect from comedy (xxiii-iv).
to the many plays of Euripides appropriated throughout the *Thesmophoriazusae* that tell the stories of women who struggle to earn the right to call themselves *sōphrones*. The *Thesmophoriazusae* is a comic variation upon that Euripidean theme; through the appropriation of Euripides’ tragedies and themes, Aristophanes is able to stage a more sympathetic and nuanced depiction of comic female behavior.

Before the events of the *Thesmophoriazusae* commence, we are led to believe, the women have been engaging in some highly objectionable activities. At the end of the play, Euripides promises that he will never again write anything negative about them if they let Mnesilochus go: “If you give him back to me, you’ll never hear anything bad from me” (*ἵν οὖν κομίσωμαι τοῦτον, οὐδὲν μὴ ποτὲ / κακῶς ἀκούσητ᾽*, 1166-7). When he makes this offer, Euripides implicitly confirms that he had written about evil women in the past. Indeed, Euripides never attempts to rebut the women’s claim, and Mnesilochus even states at the beginning of the play that he agrees with the justice of the women’s complaint when he hears why they want to execute Euripides, saying, “By Poseidon, you’d deserve it!” (*νὴ τὸν Ποσειδῶ καὶ δίκαιά γ᾽ ἂν πάθοις*, 86). But, as Colin Austin and S. D. Olson argue, Euripides’ bargain does not only confirm his own previous culpability, but also the basic validity of his supposed assessment of female licentiousness:

The radical change [Aristophanes’] Euripides proposes – and which he has, on another level, already put into effect – is thus in a larger sense no change at all but a back-handed affirmation of the *status quo*. For women to be ‘good’ in the way the Aristophanic Euripides and Mica would have them be, it must also be generally conceded that they are 'bad', for the two categories are mutually dependent.59

Through this bargain, Euripides and the women confirm the existing paradigm for assessing

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59 Austin and Olson (2004) lxiv-lxviii explores more generally the ending of the play, which has often been deemed unsatisfying by critics.
female behavior. Ultimately, their husbands will still have the right to determine whether or not their wives are sōphrones, but Euripides will cooperate with the women to restrict the husbands’ full knowledge of their wives’ crimes. Although the women in the Thesmophoriazusae complain about Euripides’ badly behaved female characters, their own previous conduct turns out to be just as problematic.

The women never contest the fact that their husbands’ worries about their behavior are justified. They are not angry because Euripides spreads unfair slanders about them; instead, they seem primarily concerned that their freedom to conduct illicit activities will be infringed upon because of their husbands’ justifiable suspicion. The women are not angry because Euripides’ tragedies hold a misleadingly negative representation of female nature; instead, they are worried that he exposes them. The misdeeds of the female characters in Euripides’ works have led men to be more suspicious of their wives in real life, which in turn has led to a restriction in the freedoms that women used to enjoy. Mica states the problem thus:

δράσαι δ’ ἔθ᾽ ἡμῖν οὐδὲν ὁσπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ
ἐξεστ’ τοιαῦθ’ ὦτος εὖδαξεν κακὰ
tοὺς ἄνδρας ἡμῶν.

(Thesmo. 398-400)

Euripides has taught our husband such evil things that we can’t do anything the way we used to before.

The meaning of the phrase τοιαῦτα κακὰ (399) is in dispute. Jeffrey Henderson translates the line “so terrible are the things this man has taught our husbands about us”, indicating that the κακά are the wicked deeds of the women, while Alan Sommerstein translates “what with the kind of bad habits that that man has taught our husbands,” signifying a quite different interpretation in

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60 Henderson (2000).
which Euripides has taught the Athenian men not only that they *should* be suspicious, but also some of the tricks and mechanisms they can use to prevent their wives from committing crimes.\(^{61}\)

As the rest of Mica’s speech shows, either interpretation is possible. The only untenable translation is that of Eugene O’Neill, which reads, “so many are the false ideas which he has instilled into our husbands.”\(^{62}\) It would be quite unusual for *κακά* to mean ‘false’ at all, but the rest of Mica’s speech leaves little doubt that the suspicions of the men are in fact quite well-founded:

\begin{quote}
*ἐἶεν· γυνὴ τις ύποβαλέσθαι βούλεται ἀποροφία παιδιῶν, οὐδὲ τούτ᾽ ἔστιν λαθεῖν· ἄνδρες γὰρ ἡδη παρακάθηνται πλησίον... εἴτε διὰ τούτον τὰς γυναικωνίτις αὐξαγάθειας ἕπειβάλλουσιν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μοχλοὺς τηροῦντες ἡμᾶς, καὶ προσέτι Μολοττικοὺς τρέφουσι μορμολυκεῖα τοῖς μοιχοῖς κύνας... πρὸ τοὺ ἡμῖν ἢν ἀλλ᾽ ὑποίξαι τὴν θύραν ποιησάμενοι δακτύλιον, νῦν δ᾽ οὗτοι ἡμῖν εἰρήνευσι ποιημένοι θυρίδας ἑξαψάμενοι*.

(*Thesmo. 407-9, 414-7, 424-8*)
\end{quote}

And then, if a childless woman wants to claim another woman’s baby is her own, she can no longer do so in secret, because husbands sit nearby during childbirth... And on account of this man our husbands keep watch over us and keep us under lock and key, and they keep as pets Molossian hounds, the boogeymen of adulterers... We used to be able to open locked doors with a three-obol ring, but now that house-slave Euripides has taught our husbands to keep wormwood signets fastened around their necks.

Euripides is preventing the women from engaging in their normal activities of switching babies, engaging in illicit affairs, and siphoning off food and wine from the storerooms of their homes. In

\(^{61}\) Sommerstein (1994).

\(^{62}\) O’Neill (1938).
the first two cases, Mica merely suggests that Euripides is indirectly responsible for the women’s decreased freedom because he has aroused their husbands’ suspicions. In the last case, however, she complains outright that Euripides has taught the men of Athens a trick to deter the picking of locks. If this is a reference to an action from a specific Euripidean tragedy, then unfortunately the tragedy in question has been lost.63

Mica’s speech is not the only evidence in the *Thesmophoriazusae* that the women are entirely deserving of their husbands’ suspicion. Although Mnesilochus declares that Euripides deserves the women’s rage, he also argues that the women have earned both Euripides’ censure and their husbands’ mistrust. In a very long speech, he gives a list of all the female crimes that Euripides failed to reveal to their husbands (466-519). The women are infuriated at this speech, but not necessarily because he portrays their activities in an unreasonable or unfair manner. In fact, Mnesilochus later shows that he has a relatively accurate understanding of what women get up to when their husbands are away. After Cleisthenes reveals that there is a traitor in their midst, Mica questions Mnesilochus to determine if he was at last year’s Thesmophoria as well:

Mica: Withdraw, Cleisthenes. I will interrogate this woman about last year’s mysteries. Step away, since it is forbidden for a man to hear. Now, you, tell me what we did first.

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63 Although Austin and Olson (2004) *ad loc.* suggest that Mica has no specific play in mind, her words certainly seem to suggest that Euripides has some specific connection to these signets.
Mnesilochus: Let me see, what was first? We drank.
Mica: And then next?
Mnesilochus: We drank.
Mica: You must have gotten the answer from someone.

Mnesilochus’ accurate guess that the women spent most of last year’s Thesmophoria drinking is extremely telling. The women are infuriated not by the specific content of Mnesilochus’ defense of Euripides, but by the mere fact that anyone would defend the tragedian when he has been the cause of so much damage (540-3).

The last piece of evidence that clarifies the nature of Euripides’ crime against the women of Athens is the terms of his final agreement with them. Scholars typically emphasize Euripides’ promise to stop writing about evil women, but that promise is also accompanied by a threat if they do not comply:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ἐὰν} & \text{ οὖν κομίσωμαι τούτον, οὐδὲν \ μὴ \ ποτε} \\
\text{kakós} & \text{ ἀκούσῃ· \ ἐὰν \ δὲ \ \ μὴ \ πάθησῃ \ μοι,} \\
\text{ἄν \ υποκουρεῖτε τοῖσι \ ἀνδράσιν} & \text{ \ ἀπὸ τῆς \ στρατιᾶς \ παροῦσιν \ υμῶν \ διαβαλῶ.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Thesmo. 1166-9)

If I can have him, you’ll never hear anything bad from me again; but if you don’t obey me, when your husbands get back from the war I’ll tell them all about what you’ve been up to at home.

Underlying this threat is the assumption that the women have in fact engaged in behavior that they would not want their husbands to know about. Euripides is not threatening to lie about their actions, but rather to bring them to light. The women have something to hide that Euripides is offering not to reveal in exchange for Mnesilochus’ life. All of this evidence – the women’s initial speech condemning Euripides, their response to Mnesilochus’ defense, and the deal they strike with Euripides at the end of the play – shows that their anger is based not on the idea that they
are misrepresented by Euripides, but that he reveals female secrets that ought to remain hidden. Their aim is not to stop him from telling lies, but to stop him from telling truths.⁶⁴

When, at the end of the play, Euripides threatens to reveal the women’s behavior to their returning husbands, one might be excused for wondering how precisely he would accomplish this feat. Tragedy hardly seems an effective medium by which to tell an Athenian man that his wife has been committing adultery while he was at war. He could perhaps stage a play about a woman such as Clytemnestra, who used the absence of her husband Agamemnon during the Trojan War to start a relationship with his cousin and rival Aegisthus and together plot Agamemnon’s murder; but Euripides had already done so in his *Electra*, and other tragedians were equally guilty of portraying Clytemnestra in their plays. Euripides’ only weapon is an ability to vaguely influence the suspicion of his male audience against womankind in general, just as the women claim he had been doing before. Nor is it ever explained in the comedy how watching a play in which Melanippe convinces her father that two exposed infants are unlikely to be the magical offspring of a cow, or a play in which Phaedra propositions Hippolytus and then convinces Theseus to make a plea to Poseidon that will end in Hippolytus’ death, has led Athenian men to the conclusion that they should be more vigilant in case their wives are committing adultery and stealing from their store-rooms. The greatest similarity is in the treatment of infants, but even those crimes are very different: tragic heroines occasionally conceal their pregnancies and then attempt to expose their children, while Athenian women are accused of faking pregnancies in order to pass off other women’s babies as their own.

Comedy, on the other hand, is a far better dramatic genre to use to reveal the specific details of female misdeeds: unlike a tragedian, Aristophanes may refer directly in his plays to the

behavior of his contemporaries. Although Euripides had only limited means to follow through on his threat, Aristophanes’ freedom to portray women however negatively he chose was practically limitless. At first, it seems that he will use the greater freedom of comedy to stage women worse than any Euripidean heroine. But the representation of women undergoes a shift over the course of the play. Beginning at the parabasis, Aristophanes balances his depiction of female vice by challenging the entire paradigm. Although the women turn out to be guilty of the crimes that their husbands worry about, the parabasis shows that the husbands themselves deserve a significant share of the blame because of their inconsistent and unfair requirements for female behavior. After the parabasis, Aristophanes represents through parody a series of virtuous Euripidean heroines. By their last choral song the women are truly celebrating the Thesmophoria, not merely using the festival as a pretext to execute Euripides and drink.

In the initial ecclēsia scene, the Thesmophoriazusae could arguably be seen as far more deeply critical of women, and far more damaging toward them, than any of the Euripidean plays mentioned. Mica claims that Euripides applies all kinds of damaging adjectives to the female gender:

\[
\text{ποῦ δ᾽ οὐχὶ διαβέβληχ}, \ \text{ἐπουπερ ἐμβραχν}
\text{ἔδων θεαταὶ καὶ τραγῳδοὶ καὶ χοροί,}
\text{τὰς μοιχοτρόπους, τὰς ἀνδρεστίας καλῶν,}
\text{τὰς ὀλυνοπτίδας, τὰς προδότιδας, τὰς λάλους,}
\text{τὰς οὔδεν ὑγιές, τὰς μέγ᾽ ἀνδράσιν κακόν:}
\]

(Thesmo. 390-4)

In what place where there are audiences and tragedians and choruses has he not slandered us, saying that we are adultresses, man-crazy, drunks, betrayers, babblers, unwholesome, a great evil for men?

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65 Bowie (1993) 227 argues that the Thesmophoriazusae proves that only comedy is able to “give an accurate and fulsome picture of female villainy.”
This recounting seems to put Euripides on par with Semonides, who wrote a famous ode on the many different types of women who are all a bane to mankind.⁶⁶ Several of these terms seem to have been Aristophanic coinages: it is difficult to imagine Euripides calling a female character μοιχότροπος, ἀνδρεράστια, or οὐνόποτις.⁶⁷ Although Euripides could portray women as adultresses, betrayers, and babblers, a far wider range of vocabulary was available to abuse women in comedy.

In action as well as in word, comedy can present a portrayal of women far more lascivious than tragedy can. Comedy also has the benefit of being able to set its plays in a fantastical version of the present day, rather than the world of myth; Aristophanes’ portrayal of female vice can therefore be somewhat more realistic than Euripides’, although it would still be far from reality. In one of the most interesting moments in Mnesilochus’ defense of Euripides, he asks, “If he reviles Phaedra, what does it matter to us?” (εἰ δὲ Φαίδραν λοιδορεῖ, ἥμιν τί τοῦτ᾽ ἔστ᾽, 497-8). Sommerstein comments on these lines, “the point may be (1) that defamation of one woman of the distant past does no harm to the women of today, and/or (2) that Phaedra’s particular villainy (revenging herself, by a false accusation of rape, on a man who had spurned her) is not one of

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⁶⁶ Semonides 7. The parabasis of the Thesmophoriazusae seems to be more of a response to complaints like Semonides’ than to anything found in Euripides.

⁶⁷ At least, not in tragedy, although his vocabulary could be somewhat more colorful in satyr-play; the satyrs at Cyclops 179-87 give a lewd assessment of Helen’s behavior and the way in which she ought to be punished. Sommerstein (1994) ad 392-4 points out, “not all these expressions can actually have been used in Euripidean drama (the first certainly, and probably the next two also, would have been stylistically inappropriate to tragedy).” Austin and Olson (2004) ad loc. note (in a more complete list than Sommerstein) that προδότις is used in the Medea, Andromache, Electra, Cyclops, and Helen (although there always in the sense that Helen wishes to prove that she is not a traitor). Interestingly, the Andromache is mentioned in both commentaries repeatedly here, and the entire play is full of misogynistic rhetoric but is never mentioned explicitly in the Thesmophoriazusae. There is a similar usage of the phrase οὐδὲν ὑγίες in the Andromache, where Hermione tells the chorus to shut the gates because “visits of women from the outside cause nothing good, but much evil” (ὑγίες γὰρ οὐδὲν αἱ θάραθεν εἰσόδου / δρῶσεν γυναικῶν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ καὶ κακά, Andromache 952-3). The chorus immediately rebukes her for being too harsh on her own gender (954-6).
those that women now habitually practice.” Both of these interpretations, especially when taken together, provide a direct challenge to the _Thesmophoriazusae_’s central premise. Euripides’ ability to act as a critic of contemporary female behavior, and in any way influence the perception of that behavior, was clearly limited.

Mnesilochus’ very interesting comment about Phaedra’s relevance to Athenian women suggests that the _Thesmophoriazusae_ is making a far more nuanced and subtle claim about drama’s potential influence on the perception of women. Phaedra’s attempted seduction of Hippolytus might have only limited relevance to the contemporary audience, but Aristophanes can be more direct. His play shows women attempting to use a religious festival as a cover to execute a man so that they may continue hoodwinking their husbands in peace. The women admit outright that their main reason for wanting to rid themselves of Euripides is so that they will be able to drink and eat as much as they want and sneak their lovers into and out of their homes without their husbands knowing (_Thesmo_. 400-31). These are real, contemporary activities. Euripides could at most create general concerns about the trustworthiness of women, but Aristophanes could, if he wished to, explicitly portray them plotting how best to act out their husbands’ worst fears.

Earlier in the same year as the _Thesmophoriazusae_, Aristophanes put on the _Lysistrata_. Euripides may have staged some tragedies with complicated, problematic heroines, but the

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68 Sommerstein (1994) _ad loc_.
69 Cowan (2008) 319 argues that, in the _Thesmophoriazusae_, comedy represents women in a way that is supposed to appear more realistic as opposed to tragedy.
70 Clearly men worried the behavior of women at the Thesmophoria, since in Lysias 1 it is cause for concern that Euphiletus’ wife spends the festival with Eratosthenes’ mother (Lysias 1.20). Aristophanes is, therefore, accessing a very real fear on the part of Athenian men that the Thesmophoria is a time when women act in a way that would be contrary to their interests.
Lysistrata shows women across Greece denying men sex in order to achieve their desired goals.\(^7\) The sex-strike premise of the Lysistrata is so compelling that the play still feels relevant even today, and of all Aristophanes’ comedies it may be the one that lends itself most easily to modern reinterpretation and adaptation. If Euripides’ Hippolytus truly had the ability to inspire suspicion in the minds of Athenian men, Aristophanes’ Lysistrata should have inspired outright panic. At which playwright should the women of Athens be angrier?\(^7\) Admittedly, this interpretation of the Lysistrata is the most negative reading possible: Lysistrata is, for the most part, a sympathetic and laudable heroine.\(^7\) However, the assessment of Melanippe in the Thesmophoriazusae is hardly less reductive. Lysistrata herself even quotes the Melanippe the Wise when brokering peace between the Athenians and Spartans (Lysistrata 1124-5),\(^7\) suggesting that the cleverness exhibited by Melanippe was not always inherently problematic.

The Lysistrata, like the Thesmophoriazusae, contains female characters who freely admit that they deserve the accusations that men level at them:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lysistrata:} & \quad \text{I am greatly pained on behalf of the female gender,} \\
& \quad \text{because men believe us to be complete villains—} \\
\text{Kalonikē:} & \quad \text{And we are, by Zeus!}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{71}\) Scharffenberger (1995) argues that Jocasta in Euripides’ Phoenissae may have been influenced by Aristophanes’ characterization of Lysistrata.

\(^{72}\) Zeitlin (1981) 305 takes the opposite approach that I do, arguing that comedy leads men to laugh at their wives while tragedy inspires real suspicion: “In comedy, these revelations of women’s ‘nature’ cause laughter rather than indignation among the spectators. It is rather in the tragic theater that the mimetic effects of representation work with such realism and persuasiveness that drama overtakes and invades the real world, sending husbands away, wild with anxiety, to look to their womenfolk at home.”


\(^{74}\) Henderson (1987) ad loc.
Despite Calonice’s confirmation that men are justified in believing women to be scoundrels, the plot arc of the *Lysistrata* tells a different story. The initial reluctance of the sexually voracious women from all over Greece to agree to Lysistrata’s sex strike causes her to exclaim, “Our entire race is so lewd! Tragedies aren’t wrong about us!” (ὦ παγκατάπυγον θῆμέτερον ἀπαν γένος. / οὐκ ἐτὸς ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν εἰσιν αἱ τραγῳδίαι, *Lysistrata* 137-8). Considering the declarations later in the play that Euripides hates women (283, 368-9), there seems little doubt that he is the unnamed writer of the appropriately misogynistic τραγῳδίαι to which Lysistrata refers. And yet, the women do eventually consent to Lysistrata’s scheme, and together they manage to force the men to declare peace. Although they acknowledge openly their appetites for sex and alcohol – when choosing an appropriate oath, the women agree to swear by a full jug of unmixed wine (195-205) – the women also believe themselves capable of solving the greatest problems ailing the city.

The *Thesmophoriazusae* undergoes the same shift as the *Lysistrata* in its attitude toward and depiction of female behavior. Immediately after the parody of Euripides’ *Palamedes*, the chorus addresses to the audience a speech in praise of the female gender and an argument that women are in fact better than men. At this point, the play seems to acknowledge that the traditional comic depiction of women as drunk adulteresses is a caricature. As the chorus points out, men engage in far worse behavior than women, and their behavior has ramifications that are potentially significant for the entire city (811-29). Because they spend much of their time confined indoors, the crimes of women affect only their own homes and families. Furthermore, they argue, women deserve some credit for the great deeds of men, since all men are born from women (832-5).

Along with this praise of their own gender, the women also articulate just how
unreasonably and inconsistently they are treated by their husbands:

κἂν ἐκ θυρίδος παρακύπτωμεν, τὸ κακὸν ἐγείτε τεθασθαι·
κἂν αἰσχυνθεὶς ἀναχωρήσῃ, πολὺ μᾶλλον πᾶς ἐπιθυμεῖ
αὖθις τὸ κακὸν παρακύψαν ἰδεῖν.

(Thesmo. 797-9)

And if we peek out the window, you strain to see the pest; and if we withdraw from shame, each man desires even more strongly to see us peek out again.

This accusation is extremely revealing. According to the women in the Thesmophoriazusae, men want their wives to stay out of sight. However, they implicitly recognize that women will chafe against that stricture and want to peek out to see the outside world, and furthermore, the men want to see women engaging in these forbidden behaviors. Women are therefore placed in an impossible position: if they behave well, their husbands will be disappointed, and if they behave badly, their husbands will restrict their freedoms even further.

The more positive depiction of dramatic female behavior continues with the parodies of the Helen and the Andromeda that follow the parabasis. Each of these parodies compresses several different scenes from a Euripidean tragedy into a single sequence. As I have argued, the resulting depictions are even more virtuous than the Euripidean originals, since they elide the problematic elements of both women’s behavior. Helen and Andromeda become passive damsels in distress.\(^{75}\) The Thesmophoriazusae begins by exaggerating the licentiousness of Euripidean heroines, but when it parodies Euripides’ texts, the female characters are portrayed as less objectionable than they would have been in tragedy. The comic expectations for female behavior are not realized.

In the end, the women of the chorus manage to compromise with Euripides and find a

\(^{75}\) See above, pp. 149-51.
solution that is agreeable to all. Additionally, in the final choral ode, they return to their ritual roles and to the worship of Demeter and Persephone. Martha Habash argues that the final choral song (1136-59) that incorporates Athena into a relatively traditional hymn to the Thesmophoroi is a mirror image of the first scene that takes place at the festival (292-573), where an ecclēsia is slightly adapted to fit with the female and Demetrian setting.\(^{76}\) In the opening scene, the women add a thin veneer of Demetrian worship to an assembly; in their final song, they incorporate a civic goddess into a Thesmophoric hymn. They are no longer portrayed, as they were in the beginning of the play, as using the festival setting as a pretext to engage in excessive wine consumption and a plot to execute Euripides. Instead, their final song depicts them focusing on the goddesses worshipped in the Thesmophoria.

The shift that takes place over the course of the Thesmophoriazusae is not one of female behavior. The women are not reformed over the course of the play; there is no suggestion that, when they return to their homes after the festival, they will no longer engage in objectionable activities such as adultery, baby-switching, and stealing food. Instead, the shift that occurs is in the increasingly sympathetic depiction of female concerns. By extensively appropriating from, referring to, and parodying Euripidean plays that feature either virtuous heroines or complex approaches to female concerns, Aristophanes’ representation of his own female chorus becomes more nuanced. The women in the Thesmophoriazusae do not end as paragons of virtuous wifehood, but neither do they fit as precisely into the typical mold of the drunk and adulterous comic woman as they did at the beginning of the play.

As Zeitlin argues in her seminal essay ‘Playing the Other’, the tragic heroine is always put

\(^{76}\) Habash (1997) 36-7. The two choral songs preceding the last one are a search for male intruders (655-88) and a hymn to the Olympians (947-1000). Although these songs both have traditional Demetrian elements (pp. 32-5), they are not as explicit as the final song.
in an impossible position: if she comes out of her house and speaks on her own behalf, she is acting in transgression of social norms.\textsuperscript{77} “Situated in her more restrictive and sedentary position in the world, she is permitted, even asked, to reflect more deeply, like Phaedra, on the paradoxes of herself”,\textsuperscript{78} but, as we have seen, staging a Phaedra is for a tragedian such as Euripides a transgressive act. In fact, the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} as a whole may be seen as a reflection on this transgression: Euripides’ true crime is not that he writes libidinous heroines, but that he focalizes his tragedies from a female perspective and therefore forces his audience to sympathize, no matter how uncomfortable it might make them, with female viewpoints, and to recognize the difficulty that women face in pleasing men who want the impossible from them.

The \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} contains a comic variation on the same theme. While claiming that Euripides has a tendency to prefer stories with evil heroines, Aristophanes in fact throughout the play proves the opposite: that Euripidean depictions of women are extraordinarily diverse but hardly unproblematically negative, from the exemplary Alcestis to the multiple conflicting Phaedras. In his tragedies, Euripides delves deeply into female motivations in ways that defy simple assessment as ‘evil’ (\textit{ponēra}) or ‘good’ (\textit{sōphrōn}) to interrogate the entire construct of female virtue. On the other hand, as Mnesilochus points out, the concerns of Euripidean tragic heroines will always be slightly remote from those of contemporary women (and their husbands).\textsuperscript{79} In the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, Aristophanes borrows both Euripidean texts and Euripidean themes in order to represent a nuanced comic approach to the problematic conception of female \textit{sōphrosynē}. Aristophanes’ variation also builds on the Euripidean theme by

\textsuperscript{77} Zeitlin (1990) 362.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{ibid.} 363.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{contra} Zeitlin (1981) 306, who argues that the women are angry with Euripides because he is being too realistic about them in his mimesis.
aligning it more closely (and more crudely) with contemporary concerns; within the setting of comedy, his chorus may directly address their husbands to point out that the inherently contradictory and self-defeating nature of their definition of female virtue. The women use the Thesmophoria not only as an opportunity to misbehave, but also to reflect on and articulate the impossibility of achieving unproblematic sōphrosynē to the satisfaction of their husbands. Aristophanes’ portrayal of this difficulty, along with his many references to virtuous Euripidean heroines, leads to an increasingly sympathetic representation of women over the course of the play.

III. “I defend my mother Semele by making myself manifest” (Bacchae 41-2)

Aristophanes’ borrowing of a characteristic Euripidean theme in a comedy full of parodies of Euripides’ plays constitutes something of a challenge to the tragedian, and Euripides’ response is evident in one of his last plays, the Bacchae. The Bacchae appropriates and manipulates much of its content from the Thesmophoriazusae. In addition to the obvious similarity of using the plot device of having a man dress up as a woman to infiltrate a secret female gathering, the plays also both address more broadly the difficulties in how women are perceived by men. Both include similar comic fantasies about drunken and lewd female behavior. Even more strikingly, they share a central conflict of the punishment of a man (Euripides in the Thesmophoriazusae and Pentheus in the Bacchae) who has been disseminating unflattering stories about women. The silencing of that man becomes the single-minded focus of the characters in both plays.

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80 Levine (1987) argues that the Lysistrata and the Bacchae also share a central concept, placing on a sacred mountain a group of women who defeat a transvestite tyrant.
In addition, the *Bacchae* builds a further variation on the theme of problematic female sōphrosynē on top of Aristophanes’ comic variation. Through the voyeurism of Pentheus, the *Bacchae* reiterates the theme of the divergence between how men claim to want women to act and what they truly want to see women secretly doing. Furthermore, the *Bacchae* expands on the religious aspects of the *Thesmophoriazusae* to add a new dimension to the theme of problematic female virtue: the conflict between sōphrosynē and the loss of self-control required by Dionysiac piety. By expanding on a theme from his earlier tragedies that had been mocked and appropriated by Aristophanes, Euripides reclaims the trope as characteristic of his tragic brand.

As Mendelsohn points out, the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Bacchae* begin in very similar settings.\(^8^1\) In both plays, all of the women in the city (Athens in Aristophanes’ play, Thebes in the *Bacchae*) are sequestered for religious reasons in a place where men cannot intrude. But in spite of, or perhaps because of, the rules forbidding observation of the women celebrating the Thesmophoria and the Bacchants on Cithaeron, these groups of women hold an irresistible voyeuristic appeal for the male characters in both plays. The fulfillment of the desires of both Mnesilochus and Pentheus to see what happens in those secret female worlds is echoed in a larger metatheatrical manner within the plays themselves: by writing plays that focus on women, Aristophanes and Euripides are also giving their male audiences a glimpse, manufactured and inaccurate though it may be, into a world of female experience that would otherwise be denied to them.\(^8^2\) But in both cases, the fulfillment of the desire to see inside the secret world of women is

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\(^8^1\) See above, p. 132.

\(^8^2\) Tzanetou (2002) 329: “Like his character the Kinsman, Aristophanes invades Athenian women’s religious space. He puts onstage for the whole city a religious festival restricted to women.” See also Damen and Richards (2012) 360-1. Although Euripides’ Theban Bacchants are never seen by the audience, the detailed descriptions given in the two messenger speeches play a similar role. On the role of the messenger speeches in the *Bacchae*, see J. Barrett (1998).
fraught with danger. When women are truly as badly behaved as the male characters believe them to be, they become frightening and threatening; if they are not badly behaved at all, then they become uninteresting and disappointing. Neither outcome is very desirable.

In the Bacchae, Euripides creates a drama in which the central focus is, once again, the desire to silence a man who portrays women in a negative light. In the Thesmophoriazusae, that man is Euripides; in the Bacchae, that man is Pentheus, and the stories he tells about Dionysus’ mother Semele are a main reason for the god’s anger. The Bacchae thus explores further some of the questions raised by the Thesmophoriazusae and its problematization and implicit redemption of the ‘evil’ Euripidean heroine. As in the Thesmophoriazusae, the Bacchae puts a man in the position of being able to dress up as a woman in order to gain access to secret female rites, but in the Bacchae that experience is both disappointing and catastrophic. The women are both less titillatingly naughty than Pentheus believes and hopes them to be and yet also more violently dangerous. Pentheus’ destruction at their hands is a more gruesome version of the fate that first Euripides, then Mnesilochus is threatened with.

Both the Thesmophoriazusae and the Bacchae emphasize the fact that it is forbidden for men to know what occurs within the circumscribed female space. It is sacrilege for any man to enter the Thesmophoria; although the women allow the pathic Cleisthenes entrance into their conclave when he declares himself their proxenos (574-6), Sommerstein (1994) ad loc. has an excellent account of what being a proxenos to the women entails for Cleisthenes and why he gets preferential treatment.
Similarly, the uninitiated are prohibited from observing the Bacchants. The Stranger refuses to tell Pentheus what occurs on Cithaeron, instead claiming that the mysteries “may not be told to those who are not initiated into the Bacchic rites” (ἀρρητ’ ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν, Bacchae 472-4). But even independent of this division between the initiated and uninitiated, there also seems to be, as in the Thesmophoria, a rule forbidding men to see the Bacchants; the Stranger tells Pentheus that he has to dress as a woman “lest they kill you, if you are seen to be a man here” (μή σε κτάνωσιν, ἢν ἀνήρ ὀφθῇς ἐκεῖ, 823).

In both circumstances, the penalty for transgression is severe: Mnesilochus is arrested and subject to the laws of Athens, and while the threat that the Bacchants pose is nebulous and existential at the beginning of the play, the nature of the danger becomes far more explicit after a shepherd narrates in great detail how he has seen them tearing cattle limb from limb with their bare hands (735-747) and spearing armed men with their thyrsoi while suffering no injuries from the men’s spears (758-764).

Regardless of the dangers involved, in both plays the potential risks are overridden by the desire of the men to see the secret female sancta. In the Thesmophoriazusae, when Mnesilochus offers to masquerade as an elderly woman and plead Euripides’ case to the council, his motivation is never made entirely explicit. He is certainly not motivated by the injustice of the punishment that the women have planned for Euripides, since he declares outright that Euripides deserves their censure (86). He only changes his mind and offers to help after he learns that Euripides is looking for someone to infiltrate the Thesmophoria. By getting the chance to see

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84 The potential dangers that Mnesilochus faces were most likely also present in the real Thesmophoria; Habash (1997) 24 adduces some other literary examples of men who intrude upon female rites and are met with violence, and Detienne (1989) explores female blood sacrifices in the Thesmophoria, particularly in relation to the myth of Battus of Cyrene, in which Battus attempts to view the forbidden Thesmophoric ritual and the women respond with Bacchic violence.
what occurs in that forbidden, exclusively female domain, Mnesilochus fulfills every man’s fantasy. Although Mnesilochus’ voyeurism is never explicitly acknowledged, as I mentioned above, the chorus declares openly in the parabasis that even when they are at home, men are constantly trying to catch a glimpse of them (797-9). If a single hidden woman was considered so alluring, one can only imagine the appeal of being admitted into the female hiera.

The voyeuristic aspect in the Bacchae is stated even more explicitly: the shepherd describes in detail the exquisite vision of the Bacchants in repose, betraying his own delight in secretly watching them sleep, and Pentheus tells the Stranger that he “would pay a huge amount of gold” (μάλιστα, μυρίον γε δοὺς χρυσοῦ σταθμόν; 812) to observe them. He is even willing to dress up as a woman, despite the mockery he will endure, if it means he will catch a forbidden glimpse of their rites (824, 838). This, of course, is the greatest similarity between the plays, as I will explore in more detail in the next chapter: in both plays a man engages in transvestism to breach the forbidden female sanctum, and the dressing-up of Mnesilochus and Pentheus occurs in similar scenes. The possibility of bodily harm hardly occurs to either Mnesilochus or Pentheus, even though both are well aware that their actions are forbidden. Instead of fearing for their lives, both worry chiefly that they will be caught in their feminine disguises and will become

85 Gregory (1985) argues persuasively that the voyeurism of Pentheus is not sexual prurience, an anachronistic concept, but rather a very Greek desire to see that which one is not meant to see. She connects the Bacchic rites in this play to the Eleusinian mysteries (pp. 25-7) and points out numerous admonitory exempla within the play, especially Semele.

86 There is some dispute over whether or not Pentheus has been driven mad at this point; although he is almost certainly out of his mind when he reappears on stage in female dress at line 918, his mental state in the prior episode is somewhat uncertain. For a further discussion of this scene, see Chapter 4, pp. 215-26.
laughingstocks. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, this threat is in fact carried out; after Mnesilochus is discovered, he requests that he be allowed to remove his female garb before being tied to a plank, but the women refuse out of spite (936-46). Likewise in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus openly declares his intention to parade Pentheus through the city dressed as a Bacchant (854-6), although his reasons are slightly more complex. In shaming Pentheus, Dionysus wants both to redeem the honor of his mother Semele and to shame the man who sullied that honor by claiming that she lied about her relationship with Zeus.

The motivations of Dionysus are first laid out at the very beginning of the play. The *Bacchae* begins, as many Euripidean tragedies do, with a divine prologue, but this prologue differs from the others. Dionysus announces that he “has taken mortal rather than divine form” (μορφὴν δ᾽ ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν, *Bacchae* 4) in order to take part in the action of the play in the guise of the Stranger. Even more surprising than the manner of Dionysus’ appearance is his declaration of his own motivations. As one might expect, Dionysus’ primary goal is to bring the celebration of his rites to Greece: he announces that he has come “in order to become manifest to these men as a god” (ἵν᾽ εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς, 22). In the closing scene of the play, he also justifies his treatment of the Thebans in these terms, saying that he has punished them because his name was not honored in their city (καὶ γὰρ ἐπασχον δενὰ πρὸς ύμῶν, / ἀγέραστον ἔχων ὄνομ᾽ ἐν Θήβαις, 1377-8). This type of plot is very familiar from similar plays such as Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, and also from the Homeric Hymns, which often tell the stories of

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87 Pentheus is particularly worried about the shame he will endure from dressing like a woman (*Bacchae* 828, 836). Mnesilochus is initially relatively unConcerned about personal vanity, since he is perfectly willing to run around half-shaven (*Thesmo. 224-8*). He only rediscovers his modesty later on while speaking to the Magistrate (939-42).
how gods and goddesses overcame adversity to establish their rites in new cities.\footnote{This is particularly characteristic of the longer Homeric Hymns; see Clay (1989) 15.}

But in his opening speech, Dionysus emphasizes to a greater degree an entirely different and surprising motive. In addition to wanting to spread his rites and mysteries to Thebes, Dionysus is angry because the reputation of his mother, Semele, has been besmirched by her own sisters Agave, Autonoe, and Ino, and her nephew Pentheus:

πρώτας δὲ Θήβας τήσδε γῆς Ἑλληνίδος ἀνωτάτων, νεβρδ’ ἐξάφοις χρόνος
θύραν τὸ δοῦν ἐς χείρα, κύσαν αὐτὸν βέλος· ἐπεὶ μ’ ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἀσ ἦκιστα χρῆν.
Διόνυσον ὁ πόλεμος ἐκφοίνιας 
Σεμέλη 
ἐς Ζήν’ ἀναφέρειν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν λέγως.

Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ’, ὅτι νὸν οὐκέτ’ κτανεῖν
Σεμέλης τε μητρὸς ἀπολογήσασθαί μ’ ὑπὲρ

Thébes first, of all the Greek cities, I have made cry out, affixing a fawn-skin to the body and placing a thyrsus, an ivy weapon, in the hand, since the sisters of my mother, those who least ought to say such things, used to say that Dionysus was not the son of Zeus, but that when Semele was impregnated by a mortal man Cadmus created a lie that she should attribute the crime of her bed to Zeus. They boasted that Zeus killed her because she lied about being married to him. Because of this I have maddened them and driven them out of their minds and goaded them from their houses to live in the

(Bacchae 23-42)
mountains, and I have made them wear the clothes of my mysteries. Every single female in the city I have driven mad from her home, and together with the daughters of Cadmus they all sit on roofless rocks under green pines. For this city must learn, even if it does not wish to, that it is not initiated into my rites and that I defend my mother Semele by making myself manifest to men as a god whom she bore for Zeus.

The rehabilitation of Semele’s reputation is presented as the primary goal of Dionysus’ activity in Thebes; it is only after this declaration that he adds that his cousin Pentheus, the new king of Thebes, refuses to sacrifice or pray to him (45-6). In the prologue, Dionysus rhetorically positions this offense as secondary to the treatment of his mother. This added element separates the 
Bacchae from other, similar hymnic plots: for Dionysus, Pentheus’ affront is personal. To be sure, the two reasons for Dionysus’ anger are interconnected; it is because the Thebans believe that Semele lied about the paternity of her child that they are able to justify not worshipping the new god. By showing that he is the son of Zeus, Dionysus both proves his own godhood and redeems his mother’s reputation at the same time. But Dionysus seems particularly angry and incredulous that Semele’s reputation has been called into question by her own sisters, the people who should have supported her the most instead of doubting her story (ās ἥκιστα χρῆν, 26).

The fact that the conflict in the Bacchae is framed around Dionysus’ desire to defend the reputation of his mother (Σεμέλης τε μητρὸς ἀπολογήσασθαι μ᾽ ὑπερ, 41) forms a suggestive

89 The hymnic plot of the Bacchae is often compared to the similar plot of the Hippolytus. But Aphrodite is single-mindedly focused on punishing Hippolytus for not worshipping her, as she makes clear in the prologue: she explains that gods want to be honored by mortals (ἐνέστι γὰρ δὴ κἀν θεῶν γένει τόδε: / τιμώμενοι χαίρουσιν ἀνθρώπων ὑπὸ, Hippolytus 7-8) and that Phaedra’s nobility is not enough of a deterrent to warrant not using her to punish Hippolytus (47-50).

90 Dodds (1960) xxx summarizes the evidence that in Aeschylus’ Xantriae Hera came to Thebes in the guise of a wandering priestess in order to turn the people of Thebes against Semele and Dionysus, so Euripides’ decision to have the negative reputation stem from Semele’s own sisters may have been an innovation in the Bacchae.
parallel with the *Thesmophorizusae*, a play in which the plot also revolves around stopping someone from telling stories that make women look bad. This parallel is strengthened by the many other similarities between the two plays. In effect, Pentheus and his aunts have turned Semele into a Phaedra or Melanippe figure. Just as Phaedra chose to lie that Hippolytus raped her in order to protect her reputation, Semele’s sisters claim that she also lied that Zeus was the father of her unborn child in order to protect her own reputation. In reality, however, Semele is more similar to Melanippe: both women suffer serious consequences when the divine parentage of their children is revealed. Just as the women in the *Thesmophorizusae* want Euripides to stop writing about women such as Phaedra and Melanippe, Dionysus aims to stop the people of Thebes from talking about Semele as though she were such a woman.

The fact that Dionysus’ actions are so personally motivated changes the rhetoric of the play. Usually, Thebes’ status as the place of Dionysus’ birth and the first Greek city to receive his mysteries would be felt as a great honor; in the second stasimon, the chorus sings about their disappointment at having been thrust out of a city that they should have been welcomed in because it is holy and special to the god (519-32).\(^91\) Instead, Dionysus comes to Thebes not to bring honor, but to mete out punishment. His opening speech foreshadows the horrors to come, indicating that this story will not end in a peaceful resolution.\(^92\) Dionysus’ anger means that even his grandfather Cadmus is punished, even though he had long ago set up the place of Semele’s death as a monument to her and he voluntarily agrees to participate in Bacchic dances regardless

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\(^91\) Damen and Richards (2012) 355.

\(^92\) Burnett (1970) 26-7 argues that until line 810 the play contains the possibility of a comic resolution; she is followed by Foley (1985) 229-30. For more on this argument, see Chapter 4, pp. 261-2 and n. 134. Although within the play this comic outcome is theoretically possible, mythological necessity would seem to point toward a more unfortunate ending for Pentheus, and his death is heavily foreshadowed within the play as a whole, not just the last third.
of his advanced age.\(^3\)

The two charges that Dionysus brings against Pentheus – that he has perpetuated the bad reputation of Semele and that he denies Dionysus worship – closely parallel the charges that the women bring against Euripides in the *Thesmophorias*. I have already discussed at length the accusation of misogyny and Mica’s denunciation of Euripides at the female *ecclesia*. Following that speech is a second, shorter one made by a wreath-seller who claims that it has become impossible for her to make a living because Euripides has taught everyone that the gods do not exist (*Thesmo. 443-58*). This complaint is not given the same weight as the first; the wreath-seller herself positions it as an addendum to Mica’s more comprehensive complaint, an elucidation on one of the many ways in which Euripides causes trouble for women (ἀγριὰ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ὁ γυναῖκες δρᾷ κακά, 455) Euripides’ atheism is never brought up again, and when bargaining with the women at the end of the play Euripides promises only not to write about evil women anymore, not to be more pious. However, the chorus does praise the speech for being clever and convincing (459-65), so it should not be entirely dismissed.

In the *Bacchae*, Euripides creates a new situation in which a character is accused, as he was in the *Thesmophorias*, of crimes against the gods and crimes against women. Although in the scheme of the *Bacchae* as a whole the more important offense is clearly Pentheus’

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\(^3\) Hamilton (1974) 142 argues that “Divine punishment is *not* limited to those responsible but like fire spreads to include everybody” (original emphasis). Goldhill (1988) 147 argues that Cadmus’ “Realpolitik” is not an appropriate way to celebrate the god, but there is ample evidence within the play that Cadmus is a true believer, so this argument is most likely formulated, unsuccessfully, to appeal to Pentheus’ sensibilities.
theomachia,⁹⁴ in the prologue of the play Dionysus seems to be motivated primarily by the negative impact that Agave and Pentheus have had on Semele’s reputation, just as the women in the Thesmophoriazusae are primarily concerned with how Euripides’ heroines have convinced the men of Athens that their wives are badly behaved and require constant supervision. The crimes that the women and Semele are accused of committing are even similar in nature. In the Thesmophoriazusae, the women complain that they have become unable to pass off their neighbors’ children as their own because their husbands now insist on being present at childbirth (Thesmo. 407-9). In the Bacchae, too, the main problem concerns the parentage of the infant Dionysus: Semele is accused of having attempted to legitimize her unmarried pregnancy by claiming that the father of her child is Zeus.

Pentheus continues throughout the Bacchae to insist upon his erroneous version of the story. In his opening speech, he is utterly dismissive of the Stranger’s claim about the divinity of Dionysus:

ἐκεῖνος ἔιναι φησι Διόνυσον θεόν,
ἐκεῖνος ἐν μηρῷ ποτ᾽ ἔρράφθαι Δίος,
ὦ ἐκπυροῦτα λαμπάσις κεραυνίας
σὺν μητρί, Δίος ὦ τι γάμους ἐφεύσατο.

(Bacchae 242-5)

He says that Dionysus is a god, that he was stitched up in the thigh of Zeus, when he was actually burned up with his mother in the flame of lightning because she lied about his paternity.

This declaration merely confirms what Dionysus had said in the prologue; Pentheus would rather

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⁹⁴ Oranje (1984) 37 argues, contra Kamerbeek (1948), that Pentheus’ theomachia is of a more difficult type than that of a character such as Hippolytus who refuses to honor Aphrodite while still acknowledging her divinity. Because Pentheus does not consider Dionysus a god, his stance (in his mind) is that of a protector of traditional religion against false gods. As March (1989) 54 points out, “Pentheus is by no means an atheist – quite the contrary”, contra Segal (1997) 28, who calls Pentheus “an enemy of the Olympian gods.”
slander Semele than accept the god’s divinity. In the scene that follows, Teiresias and Cadmus use many different arguments to attempt to sway Pentheus from this opinion, but without any success. Each takes a two-pronged approach: Teiresias tries to convince Pentheus of the value Dionysus brings to men (274-85, 298-309) and to smooth over with clever etymological wordplay the most easily dismissible part of the Stranger’s story, the idea that Dionysus was stitched up in Zeus’ thigh (286-97). Cadmus, meanwhile, argues that even if Pentheus does not believe in Dionysus, he should still pretend to, since the story brings honor to their family (333-6) and points out that the fate of Pentheus’ cousin Actaeon has already shown that the consequences of denying a god can be severe (337-41). But Pentheus is convinced neither by Teiresias’ faith nor by Cadmus’ pragmatism. When he interrogates the Stranger later and asks which god he worships, and the Stranger replies that he follows Dionysus, the son of Zeus, Pentheus asks, “Is there some other Zeus over there fathering new gods?” (Zeús δ’ ἐστ’ ἐκεῖ τις, ὃς νέους τίκτει θεός; 467). The Stranger replies, “No, the one who joined in marriage with Semele here” (οὔκ, ἀλλ’ ὁ Σεμέλην ἐνθάδε ζεύξας γάμοις, 468), emphasizing that the genesis of the god occurred not far

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95 Roth (1984) 59-60, following Grube (1941) 404, calls Teiresias a “theological sophist.” Damen and Richards (2012) 353-4 see Teiresias’ rationalized, etymological version of the story as part of the Bacchae’s hymnic tendency to tell and retell Dionysus’ birth myth. Many scholars argue that Teiresias’ rationalizations are contrary to the true spirit of Dionysiac worship, expressed best perhaps by Mastronarde (1986) 207: “Teiresias is not so blind as Pentheus, but the course of events in the play proves that his understanding is not adequate to the harsh realities of Dionysus’ power. He too is an optimistic rationalist who is tragically wrong.” Papadopoulou (2001) argues that Teiresias stands in opposition to the ‘true’ prophet of Dionysus, the Stranger. However, Goldhill (1988) 148 claims that “The comic, the playful Teiresias (as omniscient seer) may demonstrate the power of Dionysiac transformation in the very shiftness of his arguments. Perceiving and comprehending the Dionysiac is part of the challenge and the enigma of the Bacchae.”

96 Segal (1997) 295: “Both men would admit Dionysus into the city, but both would do so on their own terms, not the god’s. Neither the rationalizing sophistry of Teiresias nor the political utilitarianism of Cadmus is the proper vehicle for incorporating this god into the city.”

97 Pentheus’ snide remark is similar to Menelaus’ self-questioning in Euripides’ Helen, “[The gatekeeper] said the woman’s father was Zeus. Could there be a man with the name Zeus by the banks of the Nile? For there is only one in heaven” (Διὸς δ’ ἔλεξε παῖδά νιν πεφυκέναι. / ἀλλ’ ἦ τις ἑστὶ Ζηνὸς ὄνομ᾽ ἕχων ἀνήρ / Νείλου παρ᾽ ὀχθῶς; έλσ γὰρ ὃ γε κατ᾽ οὐρανῶν, Helen 489-91); see Chapter 2, pp. 120-1.
away (ἐκεῖ), but right there in Thebes (ἐνθάδε).

The constant emphasis on Dionysus’ divine paternity fits with the Bacchae’s almost hymnic structure and content. This emphasis begins in the first line of the play, when Dionysus announces, “I, Dionysus, the son of Zeus born to Semele the daughter of Cadmus, have arrived to the land of Thebes” (ἥκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα / Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ’ ἣ Κάδμου κόρη / Σεμέλη, 1-3). The phrase Διὸς παῖς, an etymology for Dionysus’ name, is prominently placed. But following soon after this declaration of divine paternity is Dionysus’ recognition of his mother. Throughout the play he emphasizes his human mother nearly as often as his divine father and demands that she be given respect.

But the exploration of female virtue in the Bacchae has a wider scope than the redemption of one woman’s reputation. The play also confronts and questions, much as the Thesmophoriazusae does, the assumptions and misconceptions that men hold about how women behave when men are not present to supervise them. In both plays, all of the women of the city are located out of the reach of men, involved in activities that are forbidden for men to know about. And in both plays, the men speculate, even fantasize, that the women are using this opportunity to get drunk and sneak away to have sex with men. In the comedy, these concerns are largely justified; in tragedy, however, the reality is far more complex.

98 The parodos of the Bacchae is very closely modeled on dithyramb; see Dodds (1960) 71, Seaford (1981) 270. Damen and Richards (2012) argue that there are also many other hymnic elements throughout the play.
99 Seaford (1996) ad loc. sees this ἥκω as foreshadowing Dionysus’ epiphany later in the play. Damen and Richards (2012) 348–52 point out many hymnic aspects in this first line, including the relative pronoun: they note that “a relative pronoun often signals the transition from the invocation to the praise section” (p. 345).
100 Dodds (1960) ad loc. speculates that “Eur. seems to connect the two names etymologically, perhaps taking Διόνυσος to mean ‘son of Zeus’, as do many moderns.” Verdenius (1980) 1 is more definite, arguing contra Dodds “Not ‘perhaps’ (D.) but certainly an etymology of Διόνυσος… Euripides puts much emphasis on Dionysus’ descent from Zeus…”
There are two scenes in the *Thesmophoriazusae* that parody the excessive drinking in the festival. The first, which I discussed earlier, takes place when Mica and Cleisthenes, after beginning to suspect the unknown crude old lady who dared to defend Euripides, decide to question Mnesilochus about the events of last year’s Thesmophoria. When asked about what happened, Mnesilochus, forced to improvise, guesses that the first two holy rites involved drinking. Mica is surprised by the accurate information and declares that he must have an inside source (628-33).101 The second scene of drinking parody is an elaborate mockery of a scene from Euripides’ *Telephus*, in which Telephus snatched up the infant Orestes and threatened to slit his throat. In Aristophanes’ version, after Mnesilochus’ true gender has been discovered, he grabs a swaddled bundle from one of the women and tries to hold it hostage. It turns out to be not a baby but a wineskin (733-4), although the unhappy ‘mother’ laments that she had borne it herself for nine months (741), and Mnesilochus cuts the skin open so that the wine pours out into a bowl. Mnesilochus is very outspoken when he assesses the women’s obsession with wine:

{o }\theta ρημόταται γυναίκες, \o } ποτίσταται
κάκι παντός \υμεῖς \μηχανώμεναι πιεῖν,
\o } μέγα καπίλους \άγαθόν, \ήμων \δ’ \άδο κακόν,
κακόν \δὲ \καί \τοῖς \σκευαρίοις \καί \τῇ \κρόκῃ.

(Thesmo. 735-8)

O hot-headed, o you drunken women, always plotting your next drink, a great boon for drinking shops and an evil for us, an evil to your household and your loom!

Although the women immediately renew their attempts to burn him alive, there seems little

101 See above, pp. 159-60.
doubt that he is correct.\textsuperscript{102}

Although the alcoholic portion of Mnesilochus’ preconception is confirmed, Agathon’s claim that the women are using the nights of the Thesmophoria to engage in illicit sexual encounters (\textit{δοκowell\, γυναικών \, ἔργα νυκτερείσια / κλέπτειν, \, υφαρπάζειν \, τε \, θήλειαν \, Κύπριν}, I would seem to steal the night-time works of the women and to snatch away their Kypris, 204-5) is never corroborated. The women strictly guard their assembly against any men except for the non-threatening pathetic homosexual Cleisthenes, whom they see as their ally, and the Scythian Archer, who seems somehow not to qualify as a male to guard themselves against, despite his overt sexual desire for the dancing-girl Elaphion. The women make no reference to any sexual encounters that occur during the festival, and there is no confirmation of Agathon’s excuse that the women would not allow him to join them because he would be in competition with them for sexual partners. However, the Herald does begin the festivities by cursing false lovers and old women who steal lovers from younger women (343-6), so Agathon is incorrect only about the behavior of the women during the festival itself, not about their general tendencies.

In the \textit{Bacchae} Pentheus makes the very same assumptions that Euripides, Mnesilochus, and Agathon do in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}: that the religious aspect of the gathering is just a ploy to conceal the women’s true purpose, which is to get drunk and to have sex with the Stranger.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{102} Mendelsohn (2009) §1 sees this scene as evidence that Mnesilochus is correct that real women are worse than any Euripidean heroines could be: “After arguing rather too loudly that Euripides’ staged women aren’t half as bad as the real thing (a claim amply borne out by the women’s actions at the festival: one young mother’s ‘baby’ turns out to be a bulging wineskin to which booties have been attached – a poke at women’s alleged susceptibility to tippling)...” See below, p. 194 and n. 117, for a closer examination of the loom as the symbol of female sōphrosynē.

\textsuperscript{103} March (1989) 45 points out that the verb κλύω suggests that Pentheus is merely reporting what he has heard, not his own prurient imaginings. However, these two are not mutually exclusive; Pentheus may have heard a report about the Theban women leaving their homes to join a Dionysiac cult and filled in the details from his own imagination.
At the start of the play, Pentheus is deeply offended by the women’s exodus; the departure from the normal order is for him a threat in itself, especially when female drunkenness might be involved. Pentheus’ entire opening speech (215-262) is filled with moral outrage. He is particularly insistent that the women have invented fake Bacchic rites, but seem more interested in the rites of Aphrodite (225). The presence of alcohol is also a major point of contention for him: he fixates on the fact that their rites prominently feature full mixing bowls (πλήρεις δὲ θάσοις ἐν μέσοισιν ἑστάναι / κρατῆρας, 221-2) and claims that it is impossible for rites to be holy when women have access to wine (γυναιξὶ γὰρ / ὅπου βότρυος ἐν δαιτὶ γίγνεται γάνος, /οὐχ ὑγιὲς οὐδὲν ἔτι λέγω τῶν ὀργίων, 260-2).\(^{104}\)

Pentheus’ imaginings turn out to be only partially correct; although the experience of the Bacchants on Cithaeron has elements of both intoxicated ecstasy and sensual pleasure, wine and sex are barely involved. In the first messenger speech, the shepherd testifies that the Theban maenads struck the ground with their thyrsi and streams of wine came forth from the earth. This observation corroborates Pentheus’ story about the presence of wine in the Bacchic rites, but the shepherd also mentions water, milk, and honey in the same description (704-11). Wine is given no precedence over these other fluids, and there is no suggestion that drunkenness is the Bacchants’ goal. Regardless, he reports them engaging in ecstatic, even drunken-seeming behavior later, when he describes their maddened *sparagmos* of the herd of bulls and the

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\(^{104}\) It is possible, although hardly certain, that there is a slight verbal echo here as well in Pentheus’ declaration that “there is nothing healthy about these rites” (οὐχ ὑγιὲς οὐδὲν ἔτι λέγω τῶν ὀργίων, 262) to Mica’s claim that Euripides has led the men of Athens to believe that women are τὰς οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς (Thesmo. 394). Austin and Olson (2004) *ad Thesm. 392* call the phrase “colloquial”, and Dodds (1960) *ad Bacchae 262* states that “οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς is one of the colloquialisms introduced into tragic diction by Eur.”, noting that the phrase is used also by a messenger at *Helen* 746 to denounce prophecy and by Sophocles at Philoctetes 1006. Although the commonality of the phrase makes it unlikely that a clear reference to the *Thesmophoriazusae* is intended here, it is certainly striking to hear Pentheus conclude his speech by using such a colloquial phrase to denounce female drunkenness, a comic topos.
destruction of the towns of Hysiae and Erythrae (734-68). But Pentheus is unable to comprehend the very significant distinction between drunkenness and Dionysiac ecstasy; his ideas about the role of wine in the women’s activities are misguided.

Furthermore, while there is no evidence given at all to corroborate Pentheus’ assertion that the women are more interested in Aphrodite than Bacchus, the shepherd’s description of the Bacchants in repose has undeniable sexual undertones. He describes how their clothing has become undone and how the nursing mothers bare themselves in order to suckle baby animals (695-702). As Victoria Wohl argues,

While Pentheus imagines the bacchants having sex with men in the bushes (221-25), their sexuality turns out to be much more variegated and less phallic. Their ecstasy erupts in miraculous flows, which their desire both creates and feeds off. The bacchants’ retreat is, as Pentheus imagined, a scene of erotic pleasure, but that pleasure comes not from sexual intercourse but from strange and exciting syntheses of hair with shoulders and snakes with cheeks, deer with arms, and lion whelps with breasts (695-702).

In Pentheus’ imagination, the Bacchants still require men for sexual gratification. The reality, however, is more frightening: the thyrsus itself becomes the instrument for the penetration of the earth (and ultimately, of the men of Hysiae and Erythrae) and no male participation is necessary.

The assumptions that Pentheus makes about the Bacchants are – much like the story he tells to explain the death of Semele – largely incorrect. Semele was not lying about Dionysus’ paternity, and the Bacchants are not primarily interested in getting drunk and sneaking away to

105 Seaford (1984) 126, however, points out that there are artistic depictions of maenads having sex with Dionysus: “That maenadism involves the dangers of extramarital sex was believed not only by Pentheus but . . . by fifth century vase-painters, who show maenads with Dionysos and his constantly lascivious followers, the satyrs.” The fact that such activity does not seem to occur in the Bacchae does not mean that Pentheus’ beliefs are entirely unfounded.

106 Wohl (2005) 149. She also argues (p. 150) that “The sparagmos too is part of the bacchants’ pleasure: if their strength is erotic, this is their orgasm, a frenzied ripping and bursting of flesh.”
have sex with men. But his correctness in making these assertions is not as important as their
nature; these are comic, not tragic, accusations. The scenario that Pentheus imagines is very
similar to the scene at the beginning of the Lysistrata, where the women drink and discuss their
adulterous affairs. Accusing women of drunkenness is primarily a comic trope, employed to great
effect in the Thesmophoriazusae. The problematic sexuality of women is certainly a theme in
tragedy as well, particularly Euripidean tragedy, as the very premise of the Thesmophoriazusae
attests. Aristophanes’ play also imagines women inventing complicated schemes of the sort that
Pentheus imagines Cadmus has plotted up to falsify the parentage of a child.

If Pentheus’ unfounded accusations were true, then the Bacchants would be acting like
women in a comedy, not women in a tragedy. Pentheus misconceives the behavior of the Theban
women as part of an understood paradigm of comic female vice; he cannot comprehend the fact
that they are acting under the influence of Dionysiac ecstasy, an entirely different phenomenon
than comic female vice. In the Thesmophoriazusae, these characterizations of female behavior
turn out to be mostly accurate, if not entirely so. But their freedom to continue in their illicit
activities is put in danger when their husbands, suspicious of all women because of Euripides’
heroines, attempt to curtail their wives’ freedoms. Eventually, the women strike a bargain with
Euripides that he will stop staging evil heroines. In a sense, with the Bacchae, the real Euripides
keeps his comic doppelgänger’s promise. The male fantasy of secret female behavior has not
changed, and Pentheus makes the same assumptions that the husbands in the Thesmophoriazusae
do. But in the Bacchae, these assumptions turn out to be unsubstantiated. The women in the
Bacchae are not the sort whom the women in the Thesmophoriazusae complain are causing their
husbands to become suspicious. Although the Bacchants rip cows apart with their bare hands,
destroy entire villages, and even commit filicide,\textsuperscript{107} they remain, within the terms set out in the

*Thesmophoriazusae*, relatively unobjectionable.

IV. “You must look for the chastity that is always present in a woman’s nature” (*Bacchae* 315-7)

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Mica complains that Euripides has “never written a Penelope, since she’s known for being chaste (*sôphrôn.*)” As I argued above, in spite of the fact that Mnesilochus agrees with Mica, this statement is far from unproblematic in its original context; through extensive appropriation of Euripidean texts that portray *sôphrones* women such as Helen, Andromeda, and Alcestis, as well as Euripidean heroines who present more complex models of *sôphrosynê* such as Phaedra, Aristophanes complicates the idea that Euripidean heroines are evil in the context of a comedy where women are guilty of the drinking and licentiousness that their husbands worry about. The *Bacchae* in turn reclaims the Euripidean trope by taking as one of its central concerns the problematic *sôphrosynê* of the Theban Bacchants. Although Pentheus believes their behavior to be drunken and licentious, all of the other characters throughout the play insist that their actions are chaste and restrained. These protestations work functionally in the same way as Aristophanes’ appropriation of Euripides’

\textsuperscript{107} As I mentioned above, some scholars erroneously insert Medea into the *Thesmophoriazusae*’s list of Euripidean ‘evil’ heroines. In a way, the *Bacchae* corrects, as it were, this omission by including not one but two filicidal mothers. The first of these is Ino, the aunt of Pentheus whom he suggests that he looks similar to after he dresses up as a woman (*οὐχὶ τὴν Ἰνοῦς στάσιν / ἢ τὴν Ἀγαύης ἑστάναι, μητρὸς γ᾽ ἐμῆς; Do I not have the stance of Ino or of my mother Agave?, *Bacche* 925-6). Ino will become one of the most famous filicidal women in Greek myth and certainly a subject of Euripidean tragedy, as is attested by the mention of her costume at *Acharnians* 434. The second, of course, is Agave herself. March (1989) 50-3 argues that in the *Bacchae* Euripides innovated the idea that Pentheus was torn apart by his own mother, and that in other versions of the story his death would have been at the hands of a group of nameless maenads. Regardless, Agave is certainly not as culpable as Medea, since her filicide is inadvertent; Cadmus must use psychotherapy techniques on her to recall her to sanity before she even realizes what she has done. For more on this scene, see Devereaux (1970).
tragedies does in the *Thesmophoriazusae* to convince the audience of the sôphrosynê of Euripides’ female characters.

In making a case for the sôphrosynê of the Bacchants, Euripides explores in a particularly vivid manner the problems inherent in the depiction of any female sôphrosynê on the tragic stage. As I argued above, a sôphrôn tragic heroine is always something of a paradox, since sôphrosynê for women usually involves remaining obedient to one’s husband and not venturing outside the home. The Bacchants have done the exact opposite: they have abandoned their homes, husbands, and families to celebrate Dionysus on Cithaeron. It should be impossible for women who behave in such a way to be considered virtuous. But Pentheus is repeatedly told by those with firsthand knowledge of the behavior of the Bacchants that they are, contrary to his protestations, sôphrones. The first person to tell him so is the shepherd from Cithaeron:

> ηὗδον δὲ πᾶσαι σώμασιν παρειμέναι, 
> αἳ μὲν πρὸς ἐλάτης νῶτ᾽ ἐρέσσαι φόβην, 
> αἳ δ᾽ ἐν δρυὸς φύλλοισι πρὸς πέδω κάρα 
> εἰκῇ βαλοῦσαι σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς 
> φώνωμένας κρατήρι καὶ λωτοὺς ὀπόφω 
> θηραίν καθ᾽ ὕλην Κύπριν ἡρημωμένας.

(*Bacchae* 683-8)

They were all asleep, their bodies relaxed, some leaning their backs on pine needles, some resting their heads on the ground on oak leaves, modestly, not like you said drunk on wine and flute music, hunting Cypris separately.

The phrase σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς could be seen almost as a direct response to the *Thesmophoriazusae*: contrary to what some might say, these Euripidean women are virtuous. This description of chaste and restrained Bacchants clearly captures Pentheus’ imagination: later, when he declares his desire to see them, he tells the Stranger that it would pain him to see them
maddened (λυπρῶς ννω εἰσίδου μὲν ἔξυμομένας, 814), but when the Stranger asks why he would want to see something that would upset him (ὁμως δ᾽ ὁς δὲν ἐν ἡδέως ἄ ποι πικρά, 815), he responds that he wants instead to see them sleeping peacefully (σάφ᾽ ἵσθι, σιγῇ γ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἐλάταις καθῆμενος, 816). After dressing Pentheus up as a woman, the Stranger tells him, “You will consider me your best friend when you see the Bacchants acting not like you said they were, but chastely” (ἐπού με τῶν σῶν πρώτον ἡγήσῃ φίλων, / ὅταν παρὰ λόγον σώφρονας βάκχας ἴδης, 939-40). The contrast between Pentheus’ claims and reality is emphasized once more.

Pentheus seems here to misunderstand the meaning of both the shepherd and the Stranger; he thinks that what makes the Bacchants sōphrones is their calm and repose. The reality of their sōphrosynē, however, is far more complicated. Throughout the play, various characters and the chorus declare that following Dionysus is τὸ σωφρονεῖν. There is something inherently paradoxical about this concept: how can following Dionysus, the god of ecstatic worship, be an act of prudence? After narrating Pentheus’ death, the second messenger concludes with a similar sentiment:

τὸ σωφρονεῖν δὲ καὶ σέβειν τὰ τῶν θεῶν

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108 Although later Pentheus will fantasize that the women are “held in the grip of passion in the bushes, like birds” (καὶ μὴν δοκῶ σφᾶς ἐν λόχμαις ὀρνίθας ὡς / λέκτρων ἐχεσθαί βυτάτους ἐν ἕρκεσιν, 957-8). LaRue (1968) 209 calls this a “lecherous giggle”. See also Rosenmeyer (1968) 167: “Abruptly the officer of the State turns into a Peeping Tom. One shout of the god (810) and the manly general becomes a slavish, prurient, reptilian thing, intent on watching from a safe distance what he hopes will be a spectacle to titillate his voyeur’s itch.”

109 One might argue that the Stranger is purposely attempting to mislead Pentheus here and that Pentheus ultimately will not end up considering him to be his best friend. However, it is more characteristic of the Stranger’s language not to lie but to tell truths that he knows Pentheus will misinterpret; see Segal (1982), Seaford (1981) 254-5.

110 Winnington-Ingram (1948) 11 perhaps formulates this paradox best: “Why does Euripides give to Dionysus, the patron-god of an emotional religion, the characteristics of rationality and control?” However, Henrichs (1990) argues that Dionysus was frequently perceived as a god who was “benign, pastoral and peaceful, a recipient of cult and a divine example of a relaxed lifestyle who offered physical and mental escape from the burdens of the day and the ills of progressive urbanization” and that the Bacchae has led scholars to unfairly privilege the wild, out-of-control side of Dionysiac worship.
κάλλιστον· οἶμαι δ’ αὐτὸ καὶ σοφῶτατον
θηταῖσιν εἶναι κτήμα τοῖσι χρωμένους.

(Bacchae 1150-2)

To have good sense and revere what belongs to the gods is the
noblest thing. I think this is the wisest possession too for the
mortals who enjoy it.\footnote{trans. Segal (1997) 335.}

As Charles Segal points out, “Words like ‘good sense,’ ‘noblest,’ ‘wisest’ have a strange ring when
‘what belongs to the gods,’ ta tōn theōn, inspires the insane and bloodthirsty fury that has just
been described.”\footnote{ibid.} Although the meaning of sōphrosynē can be highly context-dependent, it
almost always has a connotation of self-control. But in Dionysiac religion in general, and
especially in the Bacchae, to follow Dionysus is to surrender control. This maxim is particularly
true for the Theban women on Cithaeron, whom, as Dionysus tells us in the prologue (32-8), he
has driven out of their minds. For them to be characterized by the shepherd as sōphrones,
therefore, is striking and unexpected. It is no wonder that Pentheus has some dif
culty assimilating this description and longs to see the Bacchants in repose with his own eyes.

The sōphrosynē of the Bacchants is not dependent, however, on their remaining calm and
silent. R.P. Winnington-Ingram notes, “By the end of the Messenger’s speech we know that it is
consistent with the sōphrosynē of the Bacchanals, when provoked, to rend wild animals in pieces,
wound men and wreck villages.”\footnote{Winnington-Ingram (1948) 91.} This paradox is also evident in other parts of the shepherd’s
description of the Bacchants: when they all stand up at the same time, he says that “their
orderliness was a wonder to behold” (αἳ δ’ ἀποβαλοῦσαι θαλερὸν ὀμμάτων ὑπὸν ἀνήξαν
ὀρθὰ, θαῦμ’ ἰδεῖν εὐκοσμίας, 692-3). Eukosmia is also not often considered a characteristic

\footnote{trans. Segal (1997) 335.}
\footnote{ibid.}
\footnote{Winnington-Ingram (1948) 91.}
Like their sòphrosynē, the eukosmia of the Bacchants continues even after they stop being peaceful: Segal argues that their orderliness and moderation is still evident in their organized military response to the shepherds’ ambush.\(^\text{115}\)

The legacy of the Thesmophoriazusae is evident in this exploration of the complicated and paradoxical nature of the relationship between Dionysiac religion, sòphrosynē, and ‘good’ female behavior. In response to Pentheus’ worries that Dionysus is giving Theban wives an excuse to leave their homes and husbands (222-5), Teiresias tells him that Dionysus has no effect on a woman’s nature (φύσις):

\[
\text{oùχ οὐ Διόνυσος σωφρονεῖν ἀναγκάσει γυναίκας ἐς τὴν Κύπριν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν τῇ φύσι}
\text{[τὸ σωφρονεῖν ἑνεστὶν εἰς τὰ πάντ᾽ ἀεὶ]}
\text{τούτο σκοπεῖν χρὴ: καὶ γὰρ ἐν βακχεύμασιν}
\text{όνοι ἦ γε σώφρων οὐ διαφθαρήσεται.}
\]

\[(\text{Bacchae 314-8})\]

Dionysus will not compel women to be chaste as regards Aphrodite, but you must look for the chastity that is always present in a woman’s nature. A chaste woman will not be corrupted by Bacchic rites.

In a sense, this speech is one of the most potentially misogynistic in the entire play. Teiresias’ disagreement with Pentheus lies not in his characterization of outrageous female behavior, but in his apportioning of the blame. Teiresias’ message seems to be that a woman is either chaste or unchaste by nature; an unchaste woman will always find some excuse for her behavior, so therefore she, and not Dionysus, deserves all of the blame for her lack of chastity. This suggestion that a woman whose nature is already bad might use religious ritual as a pretext for drunkenness and debauchery comes closest to Aristophanes’ frequently misogynistic portrayal of women in

\(^{114}\) Gold (1977).
\(^{115}\) Segal (1997) 191.
the Thesmophoriazusae. But Teiresias – and, through him, Euripides – also leaves open the possibility of a woman who is chaste by nature, whether she is at home or participating in Bacchic rites. As it turns out, the Theban women primarily follow this blameless model: they must have been sōphrones by nature before the god arrived, because their sōphrosynē continues to be evident in their celebration of Dionysus.

The insistence of the chorus, the messenger, the Stranger, and Teiresias on the sōphrosynē of the Bacchants is unexpected and also slightly puzzling. Sōphrosynē is a quality that is usually associated with characters from myth such as Penelope; the women in the Thesmophoriazusae suggest as much when they use her as the example of the paradigmatic sōphrōn woman whom Euripides has never written a tragedy about. Other heroines who are called sōphronestatai, such as Euripides’ Andromache, Helen, and Alcestis, are cut from a similar cloth. All of these women are wives who use the resources at their disposal to help their husbands. They might, while doing so, display a troubling amount of cleverness and resourcefulness that makes them overshadow their husbands; there is something potentially oxymoronic about a showy display of sōphrosynē. However, the fact that their virtue is used in service of their husbands ultimately allows them to fit, if not perfectly, then at least acceptably into traditional gender roles.

The Bacchae creates a model for a very different kind of sōphrosynē, one that at times seems mutually exclusive with the sōphrosynē exhibited by a Penelope or an Alcestis: the sōphrosynē of the Bacchant. Throughout the play, the chorus in particular insists that following the god is τὸ σωφρονεῖν. They tell Teiresias, “Old man, you do not shame Phoebus with your words, and you are prudent when you honor Bromius, a great god” (ὦ πρέσβυ, Φοῖβόν τ’ οὐ κατασχέναις λόγοις, / τιμῶν τε Βρόμιον σωφρονεῖς, μέγαν θεών, 328-9). But the Bacchants have
left their homes and cast aside all traditional female paraphernalia.\textsuperscript{116} In the \textit{parodos} the Asian maenads of the chorus describe how their Theban counterparts have cast aside their weaving (\textit{ἐνθα μένει / θηλυγενὴς ὥχλος / ἀφ' ἱστῶν παρὰ κερκίδων τ' / οἰστρηθεὶς Διονύσῳ; There [on Cithaeron] awaits a female band, goaded from their looms and shuttles by Dionysus, 116-9). Weaving is, North argues, the ultimate symbol of female domestic \textit{sōphrosynē}.\textsuperscript{117} In his desire to restore normal order, Pentheus decrees that all captured maenads will be set to working at the loom (514). The \textit{Bacchae} divorces female \textit{sōphrosynē} from its most frequent manifestations: obedience to one’s husband and traditional female activities such as weaving.\textsuperscript{118} In this play, if a woman is to be \textit{sōphrōn}, she must honor the god, and following the god in the \textit{Bacchae} means abandoning one’s home and family in an especially extreme manner.\textsuperscript{119}

The worship of Dionysus, it seems, necessarily inverts the meaning of female \textit{sōphrosynē} into the opposite of its usual connotations. This inversion is perhaps unsurprising, for, as Segal

\textsuperscript{116} It is, in fact, impossible to contain them, not only within their homes but within any binds at all; when Pentheus attempts to chain up the Bacchants he catches, their bonds burst open magically (447-8). The ability or inability of men to keep women locked up is also a concern in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}; the women complain that Euripides has taught their husbands to use better locks to keep them inside (\textit{Thesmo.} 414-7).

\textsuperscript{117} North (1977) 41-4. Weaving is particularly associated with Penelope, myth’s paradigmatic \textit{sōphrōn} woman, although it is a skill that Helen also possesses. In the \textit{Lysistrata}, Lysistrata draws an analogy between weaving and the ability of women to form diplomatic alliances (567-8).

\textsuperscript{118} Male \textit{sōphrosynē} in the \textit{Bacchae} is somewhat less complex of a problem than the female kind, although still hardly straightforward. For a man more than for a woman, being \textit{sophos} in this play means first being \textit{sōphrōn} in honoring the god; see 1150-2, quoted above, p. 190-1. Foley (1985) 243 describes the shifting definition of \textit{sophia} in the play: “Sophia, sophos, and to sophon... mean something entirely different to Teiresias or the chorus as defenders of the god, and to Pentheus as a defender of the existing cultural order; the chorus uses these terms in so many seemingly incompatible contexts that the audience loses any certainty of what they mean to the god’s worshipers (see especially 480, 655-56; 203, 824, 1190: 395, 877-97, 1005).” On the problem of the meanings of \textit{sophos} and \textit{sophia} in the \textit{Bacchae}, see also Reynolds-Warnhoff (1997).

\textsuperscript{119} Although it was not inconsistent with female \textit{sōphrosynē} to leave one’s home and family to participate in religious activities, including festivals such as the Thesmophoria, the complete abandonment of all responsibilities, for an indefinite period of time, marks the Bacchants’ departure to Cithaeron as exceptional.
writes, “The Dionysiac includes the dissolution of limits, the spanning of logical contradictions, the suspension of logically imposed categories, and the exploration of in-between-ness and reversibility in a spirit that may veer abruptly from play and wonder to unrestrained savagery.”

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Mica claims that Euripides has never written a woman who is known for being sôphrôn, and Mnesilochus responds by claiming that women who are sôphrones do not exist. In the *Bacchae*, the sôphrôn Bacchant is the ultimate challenge to Mica’s accusation: her sôphrosynē is innate and essential, not dependent upon her ability to conform to a restrictive set of societal norms. Furthermore, every character in the play except Pentheus is quick to insist upon and defend her virtue, problematic and paradoxical though it may be. This insistence is even more striking in light of the fact that the Bacchants seem superficially similar to both the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (whom Aristophanes initially portrays as worse in many ways than any tragic woman could be) and also to the evil Euripidean women whom the *Thesmophoriazusae* are complaining about.

It is unsurprising that the sôphrosynē of the Bacchants is so problematized, because both plays suggest that when men – be they the men within the plays or the men in the Athenian audience – are granted a glimpse into a hidden female world, they do not want to see perfect virtue, but rather misbehavior and transgression. But once the voyeuristic desire is gratified, that same transgression creates fear, because it poses a threat to the traditional male order. The women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* may complain that Euripides never writes plays about virtuous women, but both the subtext of the comedy and the *Bacchae* seem to suggest that the men of Athens do not want to see sôphrones heroines. The Bacchants resolve this conflict through their unique combination of having virtuous natures despite their violent actions.

120 Segal (1997) 4.
As I have argued, the meaning of female sōphrosynē is inherently unstable. Not the smallest challenge to its definition is the determination of who has the power to decide what constitutes female virtue. Does that right belong to a woman’s husband, or to the city, or to the gods? Ultimately, neither Euripides nor Aristophanes provides a solution to the question of how to resolve the contradictions inherent in how female virtue is defined in either tragedy or comedy. Instead, both playwrights explore within their own genres the problems that may occur when these different definitions of female sōphrosynē come into conflict with each other, exploiting the other playwright’s dramatization of the issue to increase the complexity of each new variation on the theme.

Euripides explored the problems inherent in the depiction of a sōphrōn tragic heroine in many of his tragedies, including the Hippolytus, Andromache, and Troades. The Thesmophoriazusae then dramatizes the complexity of comic depictions of female virtue using two tools unique to its genre: explicit tragic parody and direct audience address in the parabasis. In turn, the Bacchae, a play that appropriates many major themes and motifs from the Thesmophoriazusae, further explores the impossibility of satisfying the contradictory requirements imposed by husbands and religion for female sōphrosynē. This inversion that Dionysiac worship produces in the meaning of sōphrosynē within the Bacchae also occurs more broadly within the Dionysiac framework of Athenian drama. Each successive variation on the theme brings additional nuance to the exploration of problematic female virtue.

121 Segal (1997) 307 argues that a tragedy “can hold contradictions without the need to impose resolution or mediation”; the same phenomenon is true of comedy as well.
CHAPTER 4

PARODIES OF GENDER AND GENRE IN ARISTOPHANES’
THESMOPHORIAZUSAE AND EURIPIDES’ BACCHAE

A scholiast on Plato’s *Apology* claims that Aristophanes “was made fun of for mocking Euripides, but at the same time imitating him” (Ἀριστοφάνης… ἐκωμῳδεῖτο δ᾽ ἔπὶ τῷ σκώπτεων μὲν Εὐριπίδην, μιμεῖσθαι δ’ αὐτόν). Like Cratinus’ coinage εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζων, this scholion is evidence that other comedians noticed the transformative effect that Aristophanes’ extensive appropriation from Euripides’s tragedies had on his comic style. The similarities might have become even more apparent as both Aristophanes and Euripides developed more variations on Euripidean themes and their repertoire of shared material continued to expand. Despite the difference in genres, Aristophanes’ comic brand was converging with Euripides’ tragic brand.

In this chapter, I argue that Aristophanes and Euripides explore this convergence in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Bacchae*, interrogating how mimesis can be transformative and how it can highlight the similarities and differences shared by the imitator and the imitated. The mimetic transformations occur primarily on an authorial and generic level: the *Thesmophoriazusae* is an Aristophanic comedy that reflects the influence of Euripidean tragedy, and the *Bacchae* is a Euripidean tragedy that reflects the influence of Aristophanic comedy. But the fusion of tragedy and comedy in both plays is most apparent through the lens of their respective treatments of male transvestism. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, imitation of tragic heroines causes male characters to become increasingly feminized, and in the *Bacchae*, transvestism and androgyny turn male characters into objects of mocking laughter. In the previous chapter, I argued that the *Bacchae* appropriates and develops variations on many of the

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1 For more on this scholion, see Introduction, p. 5.
themes and motifs of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, focusing primarily on how writing about the gratification of male voyeuristic fantasies allows both Aristophanes and Euripides to explore the problematic manner in which ‘good’ and ‘bad’ female behavior was conceptualized. In this chapter, I will explore not how the two plays think *about* women, but how they think *through* imitation of women to the larger issue of the imitation of texts, using transvestism and androgyny as a medium for representation of generic and authorial appropriation. Both plays use mimesis of gender as shorthand for mimesis of genre; the fusion of tragic and comic elements is echoed in miniature through feminized male characters.

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Agathon argues that mimesis allows him to access femininity so that he can write more realistic heroines for his tragedies. This idea is problematized, however, through the other characters’ challenges to the inherent masculinity that Agathon claims; dressing as a woman ends up highlighting his own essentially ambiguous gender. A similar interaction between mimesis and gender plays out over the course of the play through Mnesilochus: although he starts the play as a traditionally masculine character, he becomes increasingly feminized through repeated imitation of Euripidean heroines such as Helen and Andromeda. An analogous phenomenon pervades the play in its appropriation of Euripidean content. Throughout the play the characters repeatedly act out scenes from Euripides’ tragedies, including the *Telephus, Palamedes, Helen*, and *Andromeda*. With each successive parody, the

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2 Mendelsohn (2009) §1. Bobrick (1997) 193 makes a similar point: “Obviously, Euripides’ *Bacchae* bears more than a surface resemblance to *Thesmophoriazusae*, and not just in plot. In both plays, a man dresses up as a woman in order to infiltrate rites closed to him. More importantly, both plays imply that once humans give themselves over to the allure of spectatorship, or looking and listening, they have put their hearts and minds at the disposal of the showman. When the spectacle is over, they are on their own. The sight of the howling Scythian at *Thesmophoriazusae’s* finale does not compare with that of Agave coming to her senses over the severed head of her son, to be sure; but both are victims of the rites of Dionysus and his followers.”
*Thesmophoriazusae* itself becomes increasingly similar to a Euripidean tragedy in not only content but also form; the first half of the play is similar in plot to the *Telephus*, and the ending is similar in structure to that of recent Euripidean escape-tragedies. Just as Mnesilochus becomes a feminized male, the *Thesmophoriazusae* as a whole becomes a tragic comedy.

The *Bacchae* appropriates a great deal from the *Thesmophoriazusae*, including this nexus of imitation, cross-dressing, and generic fusion. The *Bacchae* contains several characters who transgress gender boundaries; although Dionysus had been associated with androgyney in earlier tragic depictions as well, the unexpected and unprecedented cross-dressing of Pentheus seems to be based on the similar scene in the *Thesmophoriazusae*. Furthermore, throughout the *Bacchae*, femininity in a man turns him into an object of mocking laughter (gelós) to other men. Dionysus seems to stage a miniature version of the *Thesmophoriazusae* within the *Bacchae*, dressing Pentheus up as a woman to make him laughable and directing him to spy on the Bacchants on Cithaeron. This play within a play even has a comic ending of Dionysiac festivity for the god and the chorus. This use of comedy highlights its extremely tragic frame: the audience does not experience the ending of the *Bacchae* as a comedy at all, and the story the play tells about founding the rites of Dionysus in Greece seems to dramatize the beginnings of the tragic genre. The appropriation from Aristophanes’ highly parodic *Thesmophoriazusae* into Euripides’ tragedy works as a microcosm of the creatively productive intertextual relationship between Euripides and Aristophanes.

The interaction I explore in this chapter differs from those in the previous two chapters. In those chapters, I argued that Aristophanes mocked characteristic Euripidean tropes – ragged heroes and problematically virtuous heroines – while adding his own comic variations on the theme, and that Euripides then developed those variations further in subsequent tragedies. In this
chapter, however, the interaction begins not with an Aristophanic running gag about an
idiosyncrasy of Euripidean style, but with the most subtle and significant running gag of all: in
the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the very fact that Aristophanes so frequently mocked Euripides seems to
become a joke in itself. This was an Aristophanic tendency, not a characteristic feature of
Euripidean style. However, the distinction between the Aristophanic and the Euripidean was by
this point increasingly difficult to demarcate, since Aristophanes’ parodies were themselves
highly influential on Euripides. The *Thesmophoriazusae* dramatizes the convergence of the two
authors’ styles and genres. The *Bacchae* then re-stages this relationship by borrowing many of the
themes and motifs of the *Thesmophoriazusae* in an almost prototypically tragic plot.

I. “What we do not possess, we must acquire by imitation” (*Thesmophoriazusae* 155-6)

The opening scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae* is very similar to the Euripides scene in the
*Acharnians*. Near the beginning of both comedies, a chorus of antagonists (the Acharnians and
the Thesmophoriazusae, respectively) threatens to put to death an individual (Dicaeopolis or
Euripides) who then seeks out a tragedian (Euripides or Agathon) for help in convincing the
chorus to become less hostile.\(^3\) Outside the tragedian’s home, a brief and amusing dialogue with
the tragedian’s slave occurs, and the slave seems to have assimilated some of the tragedian’s
thinking: Euripides’ slave engages in some wordplay about how Euripides is οὐκ ἔνδον ἔνδον
(inside yet not inside, *Acharnians* 396-400),\(^4\) and Agathon’s slave sings a florid hymn to ask for
his master’s poetic composition to be successful (*Thesmo*. 39-57). The tragedian himself then
appears, clothed in such a way as to make him into a personification of his tragic style. He

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\(^3\) Muecke (1982a) 41-3 enumerates the similarities and differences between these two scenes.
\(^4\) See Chapter 2, pp. 111-4 on the possible reception of this scene in the *Helen*. 

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provides the individual with aid in the form of an appropriate costume and many props (for Dicaeopolis, the clothes and accessories befitting a beggar, and for Mnesilochus a dress, girdle, slippers, and hairnet). Here, however, the *Acharnians* and the *Thesmophoriazusae* diverge: in the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis uses his tragic costume to maintain a positive political outcome, and after this point in the play tragic appropriation is subtler and less extensive. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, however, both the character asking for help and the character being asked are tragedians, and use of tragedy remains explicit and constant throughout the play.

That the *Thesmophoriazusae* brings two tragedians onstage together without setting them against each other in a contest for supremacy seems to have been a relative rarity in Old Comedy. Aside from a single comment by Euripides to Mnesilochus that allowances should be made for Agathon’s youth and inexperience as a poet (173-4), there is hardly anything in the scene that might suggest that one of the tragedians considers himself superior to the other. While Agathon does not agree to infiltrate the Thesmophoria on Euripides’ behalf, he does help costume Mnesilochus. The collaboration, rather than competition, between two tragic poets sets up an entirely different atmosphere than the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs* or the tradition of a poetic *certamen* between Homer and Hesiod.\(^5\) In the *Frogs*, one cannot forget that comedy is setting itself up as the ultimate arbiter of quality and utility in tragedy. But by not explicitly positioning Agathon and Euripides against each other, Aristophanes creates an environment in which mocking the generic conventions of tragedy, with its characteristic tropes and conceits, does not seem to be the primary goal. Tragedy is omnipresent throughout the play without being only, or even primarily, an object of ridicule.

From its very beginning, the *Thesmophoriazusae* is filled with the accoutrements of

\(^5\) For the possible influence of this tradition on the *Frogs*, see Rosen (2004).
tragedy, with performances of pseudo-tragic choral odes, an *ekkyklēma*, and tragic costumes.

The extremely metatheatrical opening sequence with Agathon sets the tone for the rest of the play. But the scene does more than merely set the tone for how tragedy will be portrayed throughout the comedy: it also provides a framework for understanding the interaction between the two genres. This framework is expressed through Agathon’s theory of mimesis, which turns out to be crucially important for understanding both the function and consequences of tragic parody throughout the play.

When Mnesilochus asks why Agathon is dressed in female clothing, Agathon describes in great detail his theory of how changing his appearance allows him to get inside the minds of his female characters:

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ἈΓ: ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆθ' ἀμα γνώμη φορῶ·
χρῆ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἀνδρὰ πρὸς τὰ δράματα,
ἀ δὲ ποεῖν, πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἑχειν.
αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ ἢν ποητὴν τίς δράματα,
μετουσίαιν δὲ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ᾽ ἑχειν.
ΚΗ: οὐκοῦν κελητίζεις, ὅταν Φαίδραν ποῇς;
ἈΓ: ἀνδρεῖα δ᾽ ἢν ποῇ τις, ἐν τῷ σώματι
ἐνεσθ' ὑπάρχον τοῦθ' ὑπάρχον τοῦθ', ὁ δ' οὐ κεκτήμεθα,
μύμησις ἥδη ταῦτα συνδηρεύεται.

καὶ Φρύνιχος—τοῦτον γὰρ οὖν ἄκικος—
αὐτὸς τε καλὸς ἢ καὶ καλῶς ἡμπέσει·
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6 That the *ekkyklēma* was used seems obvious from the fact that Agathon is called *οὐκκυκλούμενος* (96) and asks to be 'wheeled back in' (ἐσκυκλησάτω, 265). However, Hansen (1976) 170-3 significantly problematizes the idea that the *ekkyklēma* would have been present throughout the scene, arguing that it is used here only for Agathon’s entrance and exit.

7 One might also note that Agathon’s presence is not entirely necessary to the plot; although he provides the female costume and accessories used by Mnesilochus in his disguise, Euripides could easily have performed this same function himself. In the *Acharnians*, Euripides has a pile of old costumes, including that of Ino, a female character (Acharnians 434); one could easily imagine that in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, he possesses female garb in which he could clothe Mnesilochus. The apparent superfluousness of Agathon has troubled some scholars and provided for others even more evidence that the plot of the *Thesmophoriazusae* is incoherent and unfocused. Hansen (1976) 166-7, and especially n. 7, has an excellent bibliography on this topic. Hansen argues that the primary purpose of the Agathon scene is to foreshadow the importance of poetry, particularly tragedy, throughout the play.
διὰ τοῦτ᾽ ἂρ᾽ αὐτῶĩ καὶ κάλ᾽ ἤν τὰ δράματα· ὅμοια γὰρ ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τῇ φύσει.

(Thesmo. 148-56, 164-7)

Agathon: I suit my attire to my thoughts. A male poet must attune his habits to his dramas. Therefore, if he is composing a drama with women, his body must take part in all their habits.

Mnesilochus: So when you write about Phaedra, you like to be on top?

Agathon: If he is composing a drama with men, his body is already attuned to them. What we do not possess, we must acquire by imitation… And have you not heard of Phrynicus, who was himself lovely and dressed in a lovely way? For this reason his dramas were also lovely. One must compose works alike to one’s nature.

The theory expressed by Agathon here is complex, and it is made even more problematic by its use of questionable assumptions and contradictory ideas. At the core of his argument is the concept of *mimēsis*. By Agathon’s admission, imitation functions for him as a means of eliminating the distance between what one is and what one would like to be, or at least to access temporarily. When Agathon wants to write a compelling female character, he claims, he must first imitate a woman by dressing in female clothes. Agathon also suggests that self-cultivation is important to the production of drama because a poet’s work is a reflection of his self; a beautiful tragedian will write beautiful tragedies.

In the first chapter I explored how, in Old Comedy, other comedians are depicted as twisted personifications of their poetics. When Cratinus described himself as an inspired poet, Aristophanes turned him into an incontinent, babbling drunk, and when Eupolis positioned himself as a teacher of the city, Aristophanes staged him as a pederast who liked to lurk around wrestling schools to leer at the students. Eupolis used this tactic as well: when Aristophanes

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8 Duncan (2001) 28 writes that “Agathon embodies mimesis”, an interesting idea that should perhaps be emended to ‘Agathon claims to embody mimesis’, considering the problematic nature of Agathon’s argument.
claimed to be a doctor of the city, Eupolis warped that image to turn him into a quack.  

Aristophanes used a similar strategy to depict tragedians: Euripides is dressed as a beggar in the *Acharnians* not only because he was (according to Aristophanes) so fond of staging heroes who have fallen on hard times, but also because there was something fundamentally populist about his content and style that made his works appeal more to the lower classes.  

In the same manner, Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae* composes poetry that is delicate and florid, and physically he is overly effeminate, albeit in a way that makes him attractive to other men, unlike the equally effeminate Cleisthenes who appears later in the play (574-654).  

Agathon discusses the relationship between his clothing and his poetics with Mnesiloachus in some detail. In the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis describes the relationship between Euripides’ tragedies and his appearance in very simple terms:

\[
\text{ἀναβάδην ποιεῖς,} \\
\text{ἐξὸν καταβάδην; οὐκ ἐτὸς χωλοὺς ποιεῖς.} \\
\text{ἄτὰρ τί τὰ ράκι᾽ ἐκ τραγῳδίας ἔχεις.} \\
\text{ἐσθῆτ᾽ ἐλεινήν; οὐκ ἐτὸς πτωχοὺς ποιεῖς.} \\
\]  
*(Acharnians 410-3)*

You write with your feet propped up when you could stand? It’s no wonder you write cripples. And why do you wear this pitiable garb, the rags from a tragedy? No wonder you write beggars.

Dicaeopolis, having seen Euripides with his own eyes, feels that he now has insight into some of Euripides’ poetic choices. In a sense, Dicaeopolis reverses the causation: he seems to think that

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9 Chapter 1, pp. 25-50.
10 Roselli (2005) argues that this populist strain also conditioned Aristophanes’ claim that Euripides’ mother sold vegetables; this trope too is a reference to Euripides’ popular appeal and a comment on his poetics, not his actual ancestry.
11 Snyder (1974) argues that Agathon would have resembled vase paintings of the poet Anacreon, so his costume is not only a confusing mishmash of male and female elements but also a pretentious claim to greater artistry than he really possesses.
Euripides’ plays stem from something in his character that can be detected from his appearance, but it is more likely that Aristophanes created a character named Euripides who is a personification of certain aspects of the real tragedian’s plays. Although the tragedian’s work provides the inspiration for the Aristophanic character, the opposite is the case within the world of the play, where the tragedian’s character instead dictates his style. Agathon’s assertion that he cultivates his appearance in order to write beautiful tragedies is, therefore, a reversed interpretation of the relationship between the artist’s depiction in comedy and his texts.\(^\text{12}\)

Another problem with Agathon’s self-description is that it does not quite seem to match the reality of the play. According to him, since he is by nature a man, he does not need to dress up in any particular fashion to write male characters; he is only clothed in a dress to commune more fully with his heroines, with whom he would otherwise have little in common and therefore be unable to empathize. This idea would be more convincing were Agathon’s masculinity not continually challenged throughout the scene. Euripides, Mnesilochus, and Agathon himself are all very clear on Agathon’s sexual proclivities: Euripides tells Mnesilochus, “Well, you’ve screwed him, even if you don’t know it” (καὶ μὴν βεβίνηκας σὺ γ’· ἄλλ’ οὐκ ὀδόθ’ ἵσως, 35),\(^\text{13}\) Mnesilochus makes several rude remarks throughout Agathon’s choral ode threatening to bugger him, and Agathon claims that infiltrating the Thesmophoria would be even more dangerous for him than for Euripides because the women would believe that he was there to steal their male lovers (204-5). The only time anyone in the scene refers to Agathon as a sexual aggressor is when Mnesilochus asks the rhetorical question, “So when you write a Phaedra, you like to be on top?”

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\(^\text{12}\) Muecke (1982a) 41 argues that “…for Aristophanes, Agathon’s effeminacy is as much a reflection of his art as of his personality.”

\(^\text{13}\) Sommerstein (1994) and Austin and Olson (2004) ad loc. point out that there are two ways in which this can have occurred: either the sexual contact took place at night, or Mnesilochus was behind Agathon the whole time and therefore never saw his face.
(οὐκοῦν κελητίζεις, ὅταν Φαίδραν ποῆς; 153). Agathon is at best able to imitate a sexually aggressive woman, but never a sexually aggressive man. The references throughout the scene all clearly mark him as a passive homosexual.\(^\text{14}\)

In addition to Agathon’s sexual proclivities, his appearance itself also seems to contradict his argument. As Mnesilochus makes clear, Agathon is neither recognizably male or female, but a combination of the two with no easily discernable secondary sex characteristics:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{καὶ σ᾽ ὦ νεανύσχ’ ἤτις εἰ, κατ’ Λισχύλον} \\
\text{ἐκ τῆς Δυκουργείας ἐφέσθαι βούλομαι.} \\
\text{ποδαπὸς ὁ γυννις; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή;} \\
\text{τίς ἡ πάραξις τοῦ βίου; τί βάρβιτος} \\
\text{λαλεῖ κροκωτόω; τί δὲ λύρα κεκρυφάλω;} \\
\text{τί λήκυθος καὶ στρόφιον; ὡς ὦ ἧμυφρον.} \\
\text{τίς δαὶ κατόπτρου καὶ ἔφους κοινωνία;} \\
\text{τίς δ᾽ αὐτὸς ὦ παῖ πότερον ὡς ἀνήρ τρέφει;} \\
\text{καὶ ποῦ πέος; ποῦ χλαῖνα; ποῦ Λακωνικαί;} \\
\text{ἀλλ᾽ ὡς γυνῆ δήτ᾽: εἶτα ποῦ τὰ τυτῆια;}
\end{align*}
\]

(Thesmo. 134-43)

And you, young man, whoever you are, I want to ask you something in the words of Aeschylus’ Lycurgeia: whence this androgyne? What is his fatherland? What is this garb? What is this confusion of different lifestyles? What does a barbiton have to talk about with a dress? Or a lyre with a hairnet? Why both an oil flask and a girdle? It makes no sense. What do a mirror and a sword have in common? Who are you, child? Were you brought up as a man? Where is your cock, your cloak, your sandals? But if you are a woman, where are your breasts?

According to Agathon’s own argument, the female clothing that causes Mnesilochus so much confusion is a tool that allows him to access female nature. It is not, therefore, Agathon’s normal

\(^\text{14} \text{contra Davidson (1998) and Given (2007), esp. n. 4, who argues that the point is not Agathon’s effeminacy and his sexual passivity, but his lack of control over his sexual impulses that makes him attractive to Mnesilochus. For the more widely-accepted view of sexual passivity and homosexuality in Athenian culture, see Dover (1989), Halperin (1990), and especially Winkler (1990) chs. 1-2.} \)
manner of dress. More telling, perhaps, is Euripides’ description of Agathon’s typical appearance, which also seems to have an unusual number of feminine features. Euripides describes why he cannot enter the Thesmophoria himself and needs Agathon to do it for him:

\[\text{ἐγὼ φράσω σοι. πρῶτα μὲν γυνινώσκομαι: ἐπεὶ σοι πολὺς εἰμὶ καὶ πώγων ἔχω, σοῦ δὲ εὐπρόσωπος λευκὸς ἐξυρημένος γυναικόφωνος ἀπαλὸς ἑυπρεπὴς ἱδεῖν.} \quad (\text{Thesmo. 189-192})\]

I’ll tell you: first of all, I’d be recognized.\(^{15}\) Second, I’m gray-haired and bearded, while you’re beautiful, pale, clean-shaven, soft-spoken like a woman, delicate, and attractive.

It is Agathon’s characteristic effeminacy, not his tendency to engage in mimesis of his female characters, that in Euripides’ eyes makes him a natural choice to infiltrate the Thesmophoria. Unlike Mnesilochus, Agathon would have needed no admonition to speak in a feminine, high-pitched voice (267-8), nor would Euripides have needed to singe the hair off his face. Agathon has a reasonable excuse ready at hand for his beauty, as well: he tells Mnesilochus that beautiful poets naturally write beautiful poetry, and ugly poets write ugly poetry (159-67). But it seems that Agathon has failed at convincing his internal audience (and, one would think, the audience of the Thesmophoriazusae as well) that it is his innate masculinity that requires him to dress as a woman to relate to his female characters better.\(^{16}\) Instead, his natural effeminacy is emphasized.

Part of the confusion seems to lie in the fact that two different theories of identity are implicated in Agathon’s discussion of mimesis. Agathon claims to be an essentialist: he is male, by his very essence, and therefore must use mimesis to access femininity successfully when

\(^{15}\) Euripides is here referring to the fact that Agathon’s career had begun only a few years before, making his appearance and tragic style less familiar to the general public.

writing his tragedies. But the constructionist theory of identity also seems to be implicated in the *Thesmophoriazusae*.\(^{17}\) In the constructionist theory, an individual’s behavior shapes his identity. Mimesis is, to a constructionist, not a useful tool for accessing the other, but a potential danger. Imitating something else is not an action without consequences if behavior creates identity. In the *Republic*, Plato verbalizes this fear:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ἐὰν δὲ μιμῶνται, μμεῖσθαι τὰ τούτων προσήκοντα εὔθυς ἐκ παιδῶν, ἀνδρείως, σώφρονας, ὑσίως, ἔλευθερος, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, τὰ δὲ ἀνελεύθερα μήτε ποιεῖν μήτε δεινὰς εἶναι μμήσασθαι, μηδὲ ἄλλο μὴν τῶν αἰσχρῶν, ἢ τὴν μὴ ἐκ τῆς μμήσεως τοῦ εἶναι ἀπολαύσασθαι, ἢ ὢν ἢ γοθησαί ὅτι αἱ μμήσεις, ἐὰν ἐκ νέων πόρρῳ διατελέσασθαι, εἰς ἐθῆ τε καὶ φύσιν καθίστανται καὶ κατὰ σῶμα καὶ φωνὰς καὶ κατὰ τὴν διάνοιαν;}
\end{align*}
\]

(Plato, *Republic* 395c-d)

If they imitate, they should from childhood onwards imitate what is appropriate for them, courageous, prudent, pious, free men, and all things of that sort; but they must neither do nor be clever at imitating things which do not befit a free man, nor anything shameful, lest from the imitation they get a taste for the reality. Or have you not perceived that imitations, if they are continued from youth, turn into habits and nature, in the body, speech, and mind?

For Plato, repeated imitation runs the risk of becoming a permanent influence on an individual’s character. This idea seems to be already present in the *Thesmophoriazusae* in the confusion over Agathon’s gender identity. As we have already seen, Agathon fails to convince anyone of his claim that he is essentially male and masculine and therefore needs imitation to write female characters successfully. Instead, the relevant question seems to be: is he by nature effeminate, and

\(^{17}\) Duncan (2001) 26-30. Interestingly, Duncan follows Davidson (1998), arguing that “the best translation for *katapugôn* may be ‘nympho’ or ‘slut’ rather than ‘faggot’ (as Henderson and Sommerstein render it)” (p. 34). In other words, the negative connotation of the words used about Agathon’s sexuality denote not homosexual passivity but womanish lack of self-control. Given (2007) seems to agree in general, although his analysis is less concerned with Agathon’s connection to mimesis.
therefore a writer of effeminate tragedies, or did he begin as more masculine, but after repeated imitation of women end up becoming almost indistinguishable from one himself? The answer seems to be somewhere in between these two poles: Agathon is, as Mnesilochus points out, not easily recognizable as male or female, but is instead a hybrid of the two, a γύννις (136).

This observation is crucially important for understanding the relationship between tragedy and comedy in the Thesmophoriazusae as a whole. In a play where gender hybridity is used as a figure for genre hybridity, the connection between Agathon’s androgyny and the fusion of tragedy and comedy is explicitly suggested by Mnesilochus. When he calls Agathon a gunnis, he specifically points out that he is doing so by quoting Aeschylus’ Lycurgeia (135). In the Edonians, the play quoted here, Lycurgus mocked the god Dionysus for his effeminate, foreign appearance.18 Dionysus combines elements of the male and the female, but he is also a god associated closely with both tragedy and comedy. The god thus exemplifies the nexus of gender confusion and genre confusion in this play. Mnesilochus’ comparison of Agathon with Dionysus is extremely suggestive: a comic depiction of an androgynous tragedian is explicitly assimilated to the effeminate god who presided over both genres. Male effeminacy and drama are here inextricably intertwined.

The Agathon scene provides the audience with crucial tools for understanding how the Thesmophoriazusae will interact with and appropriate from tragedy. The way in which the two tragedians talk to each other, and the way in which Mnesilochus talks to both of them, is highly illustrative. In order to make fun of a tragedian, to prove that he is ridiculous, the single best tool seems to be to use his own words against him, and in this scene decontextualized quotations of both Euripides and Agathon are mocked. Mnesilochus, to justify his repeated interruption of

Agathon’s servant, claims that he is νῆεμος αἰθήρ (51), which had just been invoked by the servant in a hymn (43). Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter, Agathon quotes Euripides’ Alcestis to point out the older tragedian’s hypocrisy, and Mnesilochus quotes the Hippolytus to try to prevent Euripides from weaseling out of his promise to come to his rescue if something goes wrong. The irritating effect of quoting somebody’s words back at them is more fully explored later in the play in the Andromeda parody, through the character of Echo.

But although a tragedian’s words can be used superficially as a weapon for mockery, Agathon also shows that the best way to use tragedy to one’s benefit is through parodic imitation. This idea is similar to one that Aristophanes had already used to great effect in the Acharnians: by playing the role of Telephus, Dicaeopolis is able to mock the tragedian while simultaneously taking on the Euripidean character’s extraordinary eloquence and persuasive powers. In the Thesmophoriazusae, the same phenomenon is visible to an even greater degree: the use of tragic parody throughout the play is even more extensive than in the Acharnians, and as I argued in the first chapter, tragic parody could be highly beneficial for Aristophanes in its borrowing of both content and status from the more prestigious genre. But the play also emphasizes that there are limits on the functionality of mimesis. For Agathon, too much imitation of femininity makes him an object of mockery, and for Euripides, attempts to rescue Mnesilochus by closely parodying his own tragedies result in failure. The most successful approach seems to be a fusion of tragic material with comic conventions, such as the trick used by Euripides at the end of the play to fool the Scythian Archer or, more generally, Aristophanes’ variations on Euripidean themes.

For Agathon, mimesis is a way to bridge the gap of difference to access similarity. Parody is a subset of mimesis: in the Introduction, I defined parody as “the distorting appropriation of a

19 See Chapter 3, pp. 142-3 and n. 31.
target text into a new text so as to call attention to the divergence between the two.” Parody is therefore a superficial display of similarity that in fact highlights an essential core difference. As a type of mimesis, parody is meant to address the tension between two subjects that superficially look alike but are inherently unlike each other. In fact, tragic parody in the *Thesmophoriazusae* can profitably be viewed as a kind of mimesis by which comedy imitates tragedy and thereby highlights the differences between the two genres while simultaneously closing the gap between them. Similarly, Agathon’s mimesis of a tragic heroine also becomes a parody of femininity; by attempting to access the feminine, Agathon inadvertently emphasizes how different he is from both a true woman and a typically masculine man.

This kind of assimilation is not without its consequences, and the individual wearing the costume often ends up adopting more characteristics of whatever he is imitating than intended. Agathon, the prologue shows, has become a little bit too effeminate. Mnesilochus also believes that he can don female clothing only to help Euripides, but he ends up acting like, and then in fact becoming, a damsel in distress. Finally, as I will show, the *Thesmophoriazusae* as a whole seems to use parody as Agathon uses costume. Through parody, the comedy takes on the characteristics, briefly, of a Euripidean tragedy. But this kind of mimesis has consequences, and by the end of the play the *Thesmophoriazusae* has adopted so many Euripidean parodies that it begins to resemble the structure of a Euripidean escape-tragedy.

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21 Kiremidjian (1969) 233 argues that parody creates a disjunction between form and content and forces us to consider what the relationship between the two is and should be; this is certainly true of Aristophanes’ representation of Agathon, whose ‘form’ is female but ‘content’ is ostensibly male.
II. “I want him to be laughable to the Thebans, led through the town in women’s clothes”

(Bacchae 854-6)

In the Thesmophoriazusae, Aristophanes exploits the innate potential of the many ways in which men dressed in women’s clothes can be used as a source of humor. The play contains many different kinds of transgressions by men into feminine space; in addition to the intrusion of Mnesilochus into the female sanctum of the Thesmophoria, men in the play constantly invade and appropriate female dress and appearance. Agathon’s mimesis of a tragic heroine is only the first example; almost every male character in the play will, at one point or another, don female attire. Mnesilochus costumes himself as a woman. The effete Cleisthenes reveals Euripides’ scheme to the women. Even Euripides emerges, in his final appearance onstage, in the disguise of a madam. But feminized males are not the sole province of comedy: when Mnesilochus quotes Aeschylus’ Lycurgeia to call Agathon a gunnis, he reminds us that effeminate gods are native to tragedy as well.

Euripides’ Bacchae also has examples of male transvestism and androgyny, including the ambiguously gendered Stranger, described by Pentheus as θηλύμορφος (Bacchae 353), and the cross-dressing of Pentheus.22 It is fitting that a play that appropriates extensively from the Thesmophoriazusae – particularly one that depicts a story similar to the Lycurgeia about Dionysus’ punishment of a king who refuses to allow the god’s rites into his city – also has male

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22 Buxton (2013) 223-5 also points out that Zeus is feminized in the play because he acts as a ‘mother’ to Dionysus; the chorus sings that Zeus told Dionysus to “come into his male womb” (ἔμαν ἄρσενα τάνδε βαθὶ νηδύν, 526-7). Buxton contrasts this type of cross-gendering with that of Dionysus (p. 230): “Whereas the feminization of Zeus concerns function, that of Dionysos concerns form.” For more on the thigh birth of Dionysus as a myth, see Leitao (2012) 58-99; Leitao argues that this mythical variant gained prominence in fifth century Athens as a reaction to the Periclean citizenship law. In order for Dionysus to be an Olympian god and not a demigod, Zeus must be both his father and his mother.
characters who voluntarily incorporate womanly aspects into their appearances.23 Richard Buxton notes that, while cross-gendering is not uncommon in tragedy, the extent of the feminization of the male characters of the Bacchae is unprecedented in its genre:

Quite simply, there is nothing comparable to this play in the rest of the extant tragic tradition, in relation either to the multiplicity of types of feminization which it depicts, or to the dramatic prominence which the theme enjoys. Neither the Sophoklean depictions of the weakened, ‘feminine’ hero, nor the references to womanish-cowardly Aigisthos in various tragedies, can begin to rival the emotionally devastating power with which the feminization of a mortal is enacted through the transvestism of Pentheus – though in comedy there is no shortage of scene-stealing mortals who cross-dress.24

That the use of transvestism and androgyny in the Bacchae is meant to respond to the Thesmophoriazusae is made clear not only by the close similarities between the two plays’ treatment of male characters in female dress, but also by the suggestive way in which the cross-dressing of Pentheus, the scene that most clearly recalls the Thesmophoriazusae, is set up for maximum dramatic impact through careful misdirection by Euripides. Starting in the prologue, the audience is led to believe that they will see Pentheus lead an armed attack against the Bacchants, but instead we are given a striking and unexpected transvestism scene that closely recalls a comedy focused on mocking Euripides.

23 Not included among these characters are Cadmus and Teiresias; I follow Henrichs (1984) 69 in his assessment of the costuming of the old men, “Kadmos and Teiresias, who carry thyrsi and wear fawnskins without donning women’s clothes...” Henrichs is followed by Buxton (2013) 226-9, although Buxton notes that many scholars have incorrectly claimed that Cadmus and Teiresias are dressed as maenads. Goldhill (1986) 273 writes that “The two old men, Teiresias and Kadmos... dress as maenads...” and refers to (p. 262) “the spectacle of the two old men, dressed as women.” Seaford (1996) ad 176-7 describes the old men as “dressed, like the maenads, with fawnskin, crown, and thyrsos.” Even Henrichs (1982) 224 n. 97 mistakenly writes, “Kadmos, Teiresias and Pentheus in Euripides’s Bakchae dress as maenads,” although he seems to have corrected this view later.

In the prologue of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus announces, “If the city of Thebes should seek out of anger to lead the Bacchants from the mountain with arms, I will join the fight as the general of the maenads” *(ἐν δὲ Θηβαϊῶν πόλις ὀργῇ σὺν ὀπλοῖς ἐξ ὀροὺς βάκχας ἄγειν / ζητῇ, ξυνάψω μανάσι στρατηλατῶν, Bacchae 50-2).* His pledge is similar to a brief reference in the prologue of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* in which the Pythian priestess says that Bromius has had a place at Delphi “since the time when the god led an army of Bacchants and devised for Pentheus a punishment like the death of a hare” *(ἐξ οὗτε Βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεός, / λαγὼ δίκην Πενθεῖ καταρράψας μόρον, Eumenides 25-6).* It seems that in most versions of the myth of the destruction of Pentheus before the production of the *Bacchae*, the outcome described by Dionysus in the prologue is the one that comes to pass: an armed Pentheus attacks the Bacchants on Cithaeron and is overpowered and torn apart. Both literary and material evidence from the fifth century support the conclusion that this version of the story was virtually, or perhaps even completely, universal.²⁵

In the *Bacchae*, too, the plot seems for more than half of the play to be moving in this direction. In his very first speech, Pentheus declares that he will “hunt the Bacchants down from the mountain” *(ἐξ ὀροὺς θηράσομαι,* *Bacchae* 228). His resolution does not change after he hears the shepherd’s description in the first messenger speech of the destruction of the towns of Hysiae and Erythrae on Cithaeron by the Bacchants. He proclaims:

*άλλ᾽ οἶκ ὁκνεῖν δεῖ· στεῖχ᾽ ἔπ᾽ Ἡλέκτρας ἱὼν πύλας· κέλευε πάντας ἀσπιδηφόρους ἱππῶν τ᾽ ἀπαντάν ταχυπόδων ἐπεμβάτας πέλτας θ᾽ ὤσι πᾶλλουσι καὶ τόξων χερὶ φάλλουσι νευράς, ὡς ἐπιστρατεύσουμεν*

²⁵ March (1989), especially p. 36. Kalke (1985) 421-2 makes a similar point, although see contra Gantz (1993) 483, who argues that the dates on the pots are “end of the century at best” and therefore not useful for determining the tradition before the *Bacchae*.
We must not delay: go to the Electran gate and bid all of the shield-bearers and all the men who ride swift-footed horses and however many brandish light shields and pluck bowstrings with their hand to march against the Bacchants. For we cannot continue to suffer what we suffer at the hands of women.

It is clear from this speech that Pentheus has in mind a full-scale military assault on the Bacchants, including infantry (781), cavalry (782), and archers (783-4). Pentheus has devised what seems to him to be the most appropriate masculine response to deal with a feminine threat. Any rational observer would note that a military engagement is unlikely to be successful, in light of the shepherd’s immediately preceding description of how the Bacchants could not be wounded by spears (τοῖς μὲν γὰρ οὐχ ἡμασσε λογχωτὸν βέλος, 761). Pentheus, however, is not deterred.

After some more banter with the Stranger, he asks a slave to bring him his armor (809).

At line 810, however, the plot takes a sudden and unexpected turn. Dionysus makes an unmetrical exclamation, ἄ, and from that point onward an entirely different course of action is decreed for Pentheus. Instead of dressing up as a hoplite and attacking the Bacchants directly,

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26 March (1989) 39: “Thus the two sexes in Thebes are clearly divided: the women are already worshipping Dionysos on the mountain, while the men are expected to take military action to get them back. All seems to be ready for pitched battle, in the course of which Pentheus will be killed.”

27 March (1989) 40 describes Pentheus’ speech as “pathetically grandiloquent”.

28 Burnett (1970) 23-4 argues that this moment almost has the feel of the Stranger casting a spell on Pentheus: “Quite suddenly a prophet who has been kind, effeminate, languid, weak, scorned and threatened with death, imaged as a hunted animal, becomes hard, bull-like, energetic and powerful, one who controls the lives of others and is described as a hunter is. In exactly the same moment a ruling prince undergoes the reverse transformation: forgetting his cruel, masculine strength, his contempt, and his public role, he becomes a creature who is pliable, womanish and weak, who is scorned, disguised and hunted like a beast. All this happens in a swift and magical pause that is marked by a break in the stichomythia.”
or even attempting to set up an ambush for them,\textsuperscript{29} Pentheus begins to seriously consider the Stranger’s suggestion that he should attempt to spy on the Bacchants by dressing as a woman.\textsuperscript{30} Although he does not entirely agree to the plan until later, his willingness even to entertain it has seemed to many scholars to be an uncharacteristic move that is evidence that Dionysus has driven him insane.\textsuperscript{31}

The Stranger offers a rational reason for this strategy; he explains to Pentheus that he will be able to obtain valuable reconnaissance information on the Bacchants by dressing up as a woman, since they would kill him on sight if they see that he is a man. Pentheus reluctantly agrees.\textsuperscript{32} Upon closer examination, the Stranger’s seemingly reasonable suggestion makes little sense, since the shepherd has already provided Pentheus with a detailed description of the activity of the Bacchants. Furthermore, if Pentheus’ goal is to view the Bacchants without being seen, his appearance matters little, and an elaborate female costume might be a hindrance to stealth. Ultimately, his disguise ends up being both unsuccessful and unnecessary. When he arrives on Mt. Cithaeron and cannot see the Bacchants as well as he would like to, the Stranger bends a pine tree and sets him on top. From this perch, the messenger claims that Pentheus “does not see the maenads, but rather is seen by them” (\textit{ὤφθη δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ κατεῖδε μαινάδας}, 1075),

\textsuperscript{29} MacLeod (2006) suggests that the ambush in the first messenger speech is false foreshadowing of the expected ambush that Pentheus never ends up setting.

\textsuperscript{30} Although Hamilton (1974) 142-4 argues that a metaphorical battle does occur, and that scholars who insist that Dionysus has changed his plan, such as Burnett, are being too literal. March (1989) 43 points out that the second messenger uses a great deal of military terminology to describe Pentheus’ trip to Cithaeron, which might support Hamilton’s argument that a battle does occur, even if it is a battle of an unexpected nature. Segal (1997) 176 compares the dressing of Pentheus to Homeric scenes of arming for battle.

\textsuperscript{31} Although the fact that the Stranger begs Dionysus to drive Pentheus mad at 849-51 might suggest that he is not yet insane when he leaves the stage. Still, because the Stranger is in fact Dionysus in disguise, this speech may be more for the benefit of the chorus.

\textsuperscript{32} Pentheus seems on the verge of changing his mind at 828 and 836; at 845-6 he seems undecided as to which course of action he will take.
and immediately after Dionysus announces Pentheus’ presence and identity to the Bacchants and commands them to attack him.

Pentheus’ female costume serves little functional purpose in the play.\(^{33}\) It does, however, have a powerful symbolic and dramatic impact.\(^{34}\) The costuming of Pentheus has been connected to the male transvestism that was a common feature in Dionysiac initiation rites.\(^{35}\) In this interpretation, the failure of Pentheus’ female costume to fool the Bacchants serves as a metaphor for his rejection of Dionysus and failed initiation into the Bacchic mysteries.\(^{36}\) Helene Foley also connects the costuming of Pentheus to the dressing of a sacrificial animal before the slaughter, pointing out that he is wreathed just as a bull would be before a sacrifice.\(^{37}\) In addition to these powerful resonances, the cross-dressing of Pentheus serves another function: it implicitly recalls the remarkably similar cross-dressing scene in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}. As Daniel Mendelsohn points out, the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} and the \textit{Bacchae} both feature “a man risking his life in order to spy on secret female rites, and dressing up as a woman in order to do so.”\(^{38}\) The similarities between the two scenes are so extensive, in fact, that there is little doubt that the scene in the \textit{Bacchae} was inspired by the corresponding scene in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}.

\(^{33}\) Seaford (1981) 258: “the disguise serves no purpose in the story.”
\(^{34}\) March (1989) 38: “Certainly until line 810 the whole dramatic action seems to be moving towards the kind of confrontation forecast in the Prologue, with an armed Pentheus moving out to meet his fate as he does on the vases. Instead, after 810 Dionysus makes Pentheus mad and leads him in a maenad’s costume, alone, unarmed, insane, to the mountain where he is to be torn apart. The sheer dramatic impact of this turn in the action must have been immense.”
\(^{35}\) See especially Dodds (1960) xxvii-xxviii and \textit{ad} 854-5 for an argument that Pentheus’ dress is a traditional part of Dionysiac ritual and Segal (1997) 158-214.
\(^{38}\) Mendelsohn (2009), §1.
In both scenes, the cross-dresser is a very masculine character. Physically, Mnesilochus is both hirsute and gruff-voiced (216-232, 266-268); his beard must be shaved and his voice disguised for him to play a convincing woman. Pentheus, as a young man, does not have a beard that needs to be shaved off in order to play a female role. However, in spite of his youth, in the first 800 lines of the play Pentheus insists upon upholding traditional gender roles: he declares his intent to set the imprisoned Bacchants to work weaving, a traditionally female activity, and asserts his masculinity frequently by attempting to solve all problems with armed violence even when the situation clearly does not call for it. But in spite of their overt masculinity, both Mnesilochus and Pentheus are transformed into transvestites who worry about their hairdos and hemlines.

In both plays, a traditionally masculine man consents to give up his own agency and put himself into the hands of another man to be dressed as a woman. Both Mnesilochus and

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39 As far as I am aware, only a few scholars aside from Mendelsohn and Bobrick claim outright that the Bacchae scene was directly influenced by the Thesmophoriazusae, including Foley (1985) 228: “Since the allusion to Aeschylus is followed by the dressing of Euripides’ relative as a woman, we can speculate either that Euripides adopted the dressing of Pentheus as a woman from Aeschylus’ Dionysiac drama (in art Pentheus is portrayed in armor or in masculine garments as he spies on the maenads or is attacked by them), or that Euripides was inspired by Aristophanes to invent the toilet scene of the Bacchae, going beyond Aeschylus’ emphasis on the sexual ambiguity of the god’s identity to borrow Old Comedy’s ludicrous transformations of the body to express an equivalent ambiguity in the human soul. Euripides’ gesture is in any case outrageous, since Aristophanes’ parody seems clearly directed at addressing the limits that tragedy must respect in relation to costume.” Wyles (2011) 99-100 makes a similar point, although I believe that she overemphasizes the agonistic nature of the intertextual interaction between the two playwrights: “Even though the process of putting on the costume does not take place on stage, there is nevertheless a strong allusion to the Inlaw scene which invites the audience to interpret the presentation of Pentheus through the lens of that earlier comic scene... It seems that [Euripides] retaliates against Aristophanes’ strategy for making the costuming process, and the creation of theatre, into something humorous, by showing that in fact putting on costume could be deadly serious; even those elements which had been comic in the Aristophanic handling of it, like the fussing over pleats, could be made unfunny in Euripides’ hands.”

40 For the potentially sympathy-inducing effect of Pentheus’ youth, see below, pp. 264-5 and n. 143.

41 Segal (1978) 188 agrees: “it would be rash to view Pentheus as a symbol of the Greek male in general. Yet, like Creon in the Antigone, he seems to embody a type of overreaction to feminine modes of experience which was not uncommon in this male-dominated society.”
Pentheus declare that they are “giving themselves over” to Euripides and the Stranger to be dressed; Mnesilochus tells Euripides, “Do whatever seems best to you; I have given myself over entirely” (ἀλλὰ πράττ’, εἴ σοι δοκεῖ. Ἐ μὴ πιστῶν μαυτὸν ὀφελόν ποτε, Thesm. 217), and Pentheus tells the Stranger, “Here, you arrange [my hair]; I depend on you” (ἰδοῦ, ὅν κόσμει· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνακείμεσθα δῆ, Bacchae 934). For Pentheus, the use of the word ἀνάκειμαι is particularly vivid, since it is a word used frequently in the context of votive offerings to gods.\footnote{LSJ s.v. ἀνάκειμαι. Dodds (1960) ad loc. claims “there is a sinister unconscious irony in P.’s choice of words: to the audience ἀνακείμεσθα will suggest that the King is now in some sense ‘dedicated’.”}

Additionally, both Mnesilochus and Pentheus are aided in their transvestism by an androgynous man whose effeminacy provokes feelings of attraction. Although Mnesilochus is dressed primarily by Euripides, Agathon provides much of the feminine clothing, and Mnesilochus treats him throughout the scene as a potential erōmenos.\footnote{Puzzlingly, Duncan (2001) claims that Agathon’s attractiveness to Mnesilochus has often been overlooked by scholars.} The relationship between Pentheus and the Stranger is similar, albeit made somewhat more complicated by the fact that the Stranger is Pentheus’ cousin Dionysus in disguise and by Pentheus’ feelings of hostility that compete with his attraction. Pentheus cannot keep himself from commenting frequently on the Stranger’s androgynous appearance. Before he has seen the Dionysiac priest with his own eyes, he claims to have heard that the Stranger has “fragrant golden curls, with the wine-dark graces of Aphrodite in his eyes” (ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν εὐοσμῶν κόμην, / οἶνῶπας ὀσσῶις χάριτας Ἀφροδίτης ἔχων, Bacchae 235-6). When the two come face-to-face later in the play, Pentheus confirms that this report was correct:

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\begin{align*}
\text{ἀτάρ τὸ μὲν σῶμί οἴκ ἄμορφος εἴ. κένε,} \\
\text{ώς ἐς γυναῖκας, ἐφ’ ὀπερ ἐς Θήβας πάρει·} \\
\text{πλῶκαμός τε γάρ σου τανάσος, οὐ πάλης ὑπο,} \\
\text{γένων παρ’ αὐτήν κεχυμένος, πόθου πλέως·}
\end{align*}
\]
Your body is not unattractive, stranger, at least not to women, which is why you have come to Thebes. Your hair is long, not fit for wrestling, but it lies over your cheeks, full of desire. You have carefully tended to your fair complexion and kept yourself out of the sun and in the shade, hunting Aphrodite with your beauty.

Pentheus’ description of the Stranger sounds remarkably similar to Euripides’ description of Agathon’s physical appearance in the Thesmophoriazusae (σὺ δὲ εὐπρόσωπος λευκὸς ἐξυρημένος / γυναικόφωνος ἁπαλὸς εὐπρεπὴς ἰδεῖς; you’re beautiful, pale, clean-shaven, soft-spoken like a woman, delicate, and attractive, Thesmo. 191-2). But while Euripides considers these effeminate attributes of Agathon’s appearance assets that would help the younger tragedian infiltrate the Thesmophoria, Pentheus finds the Stranger’s appearance offensive. He focuses on how every aspect of the Stranger’s body renders him unsuitable for traditional masculine activities: his long hair makes him unfit for wrestling (455), his paleness implies that he rarely goes out in the sun but instead stays indoors as women do (457-8), and instead of hunting animals, he hunts only.

44 Discussed above, p. 207.
Aphrodite (459). But although Pentheus disapproves of the Stranger’s effeminate appearance, he also implicitly recognizes and resents the attractiveness and power that it gives him. When Pentheus captures the Stranger, he soon declares that his first action will be to cut off the Stranger’s long curls (πρῶτον μὲν ἁβρὸν βόστρυχον τεμῶ σέθεν, 493), even though the Stranger warns him that his hair is sacred because it is dedicated to the god (494). Shearing the Stranger’s hair is meant to deprive him of both sexual and religious power. The Stranger retaliates in the cross-dressing scene by forcing Pentheus to wear a long wig (831).

The wig that Pentheus wears is just one aspect of a costume that seems unnecessarily elaborate. In this too the Bacchae resembles the Thesmophoriazusae; in both cross-dressing scenes, the degree of accessorization seems excessive, and the person responsible for the

There is much debate about whether Pentheus’ outward disgust for the Stranger’s appearance is a mask for sexual attraction. Mendelsohn (2009) §1 claims, “When the young king first lays eyes on his opponent he declares himself repelled, but finds himself strangely fascinated by the soft and girlish youth – just as Mnesilochus was intrigued by the fey Agathon in Thesmophoriazusae, a comic scene of gender confusion now carefully clothed in darker, tragic clothes.” But, as I argued above, what Mnesilochus feels for Agathon is essentially the heterosexual desire of a masculine man for an effeminate man, whereas the dynamic between Pentheus and the Stranger is more complicated. The most sensitive exploration of the topic is that of Wohl (2005) 145: “Male and female blur, as do homosexuality and heterosexuality. When the male Pentheus gazes with desire on an effeminate Dionysus and imagines him through the eyes of his female followers, is this heterosexual desire (and in which direction – female for male, or male for female?) or homosexual (and in that case, male or female?)? Traditional gender and sex categories – the polarities so central to this play and the scholarship on it – implode…” Wohl’s argument seems to me preferable both to the argument of Poole (1990) 117-120 that Pentheus is a repressed homosexual and also to the opposite view, expressed in Ormand (2003) 10-13, especially p. 12: “if Pentheus’ description of Dionysus here expresses a subtextual desire (and that is far from clear), then that would be normal masculine desire for an attractive, boyish man.”

Zeitlin (1990) 342 draws a contrast between Pentheus and the Stranger in this respect: “But if Pentheus’ feminization is the emblem of his defeat, Dionysos’s effeminacy is a sign of his hidden power. Here are two males, cousins through their genealogical ties, both engaged in a masculine contest for supremacy. One, however, gains mastery by manipulating a feminized identity, while the other is vanquished when he finally succumbs to it. At the moment when the two males appear together on stage in similar dress, we might perceive an instructive spectacle of the inclusive functions of the feminine in drama - one on the side of power and the other on the side of weakness.”

Dodds (1960) ad loc. argues that the Stranger must mean a wig because Pentheus’ derogatory comment at 455 would not be effective if his own hair were also long. Seidensticker (1978) 316-7 argues that these two scenes – Pentheus cutting the Stranger’s hair, and the Stranger forcing Pentheus to wear a wig – are intended to be mirror images of each other.
costuming – Euripides in the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the Stranger in the *Bacchae* – seems to secretly enjoy the process while pretending that every successive ridiculous measure is absolutely necessary. Mnesilochus’ costume consists of singeing off both his facial and pubic hair. The latter seems purely for the amusement of Euripides and the audience, since it serves little practical purpose: anyone who would be close enough to see his pubic hair (or lack thereof) would presumably also see his not-well-hidden phallus. Euripides also dresses Mnesilochus in a ἱμάτιον (250), στρόφιον (251), κροκωτὸν (253), κεκρυφάλος (257), μύτρα (257), ἕγκυκλον (261), and ύποδήματα (262).

In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus wears a fawnskin and carries a thyrsus, as all Bacchic initiates do, including the Stranger (25) and Teiresias and Cadmus (176, 251). These items are religious signifiers without gender affiliation. But Pentheus also wears a πέπλος (821), μύτρα (833), and ζῶναί (935). These feminine articles of clothing and accessories are entirely gratuitous. When the shepherd tells Pentheus about the appearance of the women on Cithaeron, he describes what seems to be the standard Bacchic uniform:

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\begin{align*}
\text{καὶ πρῶτα μὲν καθεῖσαν εἰς ὀίμους κάμας} \\
\text{νεβρίδας τ’ ἀνεστείλανθ’ ὀσαισων ἁμμάτων} \\
\text{σύνδεσμ’ ἐλέλυτο, καὶ καταστίκτους δορᾶς} \\
\text{ὁφεσι κατεξώσαντο λεχμώσιν γέννω.} \\
\text{... ἐπὶ δ’ ἔθεντο κισσίνους} \\
\text{στεφάνους δρυός τε μύλακός τ’ ἀνθεσφόρου.} \\
\text{θύρσον δὲ τις λαβοῦσ’ ἐπαισεν ἐς πέτραν...} \\
\end{align*}
\]

*Bacchae 695-8, 702-4*

And first they let their hair fall around their shoulders, and all who had loosened their knots refastened their fawnskins, and they girdled the speckled skins with serpents licking their jaws... they

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48 The unnecessary elaboration of the costume in the *Thesmophoriazusae* might recall the similar surfeit of accessories in the *Acharnians*.

49 Which, indeed, is precisely what happens (643-9).
wreathed themselves with ivy, oak, and yew. One took her thyrsus and struck a rock with it…

The attire of the Cithaeron Bacchants matches what all other devotees have clothed themselves in: fawnskins, wreaths, and thyrsoi. With his dress, non-serpentine girdle, and headband, Pentheus would be highly conspicuous. Although the Stranger describes Pentheus as “wearing the attire of a woman, a maenad, a Bacchant” (σκευὴν γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης ἔχων, 915), only the first epithet truly fits. Although Pentheus’ outfit may have been characteristic of Dionysiac dress in contemporary Athenian ritual contexts, within the play he is unique.50

There is an erroneous tendency among scholars to emphasize the similarities in appearance between the transvestite Pentheus and the Stranger, claiming that the Stranger turns the Theban king into a double of himself and that when Pentheus emerges in his female garb the two are practically indistinguishable.51 However, if Pentheus has carried out his threat to cut off the Stranger’s hair, then the only similarity between their appearances would have been their thyrsoi. Pentheus is bewigged, elaborately accessorized, and dressed not as a maenad or a Dionysiac initiate but instead in the kind of clothes in which a woman would typically be dressed. The femininity rather than religiosity of Pentheus’ costume sets him apart from all of the other characters in the play. Every other character is dressed either in the uniform of Dionysiac worship or in typical male costumes. The contrast makes Pentheus’ elaborate female disguise even more incongruous, and as I argued in my second chapter, the potential of incongruous costumes to create both humor and sympathy is a theme explored by both Aristophanes and Euripides. In the Bacchae, the previous treatment of the theme is reversed: in the Acharnians,

Dicaeopolis’ ragged costume generates humor in the external audience (the Athenians watching the comedy) and sympathy in the play’s internal audience (the chorus), while in the _Bacchae_ Pentheus’ costume is intended by the Stranger to make him laughable to the Thebans. The Stranger costumes Pentheus not in such a way as to make him conform with Dionysiac ritual dress, but to make him a ridiculous spectacle. His transvestism is more similar to that of Mnesilochus in the _Thesmophoriazusae_ than it is to the androgyny of the god.

Although Mnesilochus and Pentheus both display initial reluctance, they eventually allow themselves to be elaborately costumed and then act their new parts with great energy. Mnesilochus nearly changes his mind while his face is being shaved and attempts to run off to the temple of the Eumenides (_Thesm. 224-6_). But once Euripides convinces him to continue, Mnesilochus quickly becomes more enthusiastic, asking for help arranging his skirt properly around his legs (256) and consulting Euripides about whether his new hairstyle looks flattering (260). Pentheus too vacillates at first and seems to be on the verge of refusing to dress as a woman (_Bacchae 836_). But when he emerges from the palace, he has devoted himself wholeheartedly to playing the role of a woman and a Bacchant, tossing his hair around in Bacchic ecstasy (930-1) and verifying with the Stranger that his dress falls becomingly on his legs (937-8). That Pentheus sees himself as playing a role is clear when he calls his female dress a _schēma_ (832). Additionally, both Mnesilochus and Pentheus envision that they look similar to characters

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52 I do not mention the effect of Pentheus’ costume on the play’s external audience because there is no scholarly consensus on whether his appearance is meant to make the audience laugh. The best analysis seems to me to be that of Scharffenberger (1995) 313: “The conduct of Pentheus dressed to kill in the _Bacchae_, for example, may have its humorous side, but, its fundamental effect is to increase our apprehension of the terrible consequences of his actions.”

53 Austin and Olson (2004) _ad Thesmophoriazusae_ 256 take the similarity between the concern of Mnesilochus and Pentheus for how their dresses fall as proof that “the effect of a woman’s chiton depended in large part on how it hung.”
who appear onstage later in the plays: Mnesilochus looks into the mirror and declares that he sees not himself but Cleisthenes (Thesmo. 236), and Pentheus asks the Stranger if he looks very much like his mother Agave or his aunt Ino (Bacchae 925-6). Both men go one step further than simply dressing like women and actually assimilate their appearances to women (or transvestites) with whom they are familiar.54

But as Agathon shows in the first scene of the Thesmophoriazusae, costuming oneself can be a transformative act. Both Mnesilochus and Pentheus seem to believe that they can dress up as women without consequence, using their female costumes to access secret feminine rites without being in any way affected by the experience. This assumption turns out to be incorrect. Mnesilochus, as I will argue, becomes increasingly feminized throughout the play, especially as he begins to play the roles of Euripidean heroines such as Helen and Andromeda. In the Bacchae as well, Pentheus begins to adopt more female traits after he puts on a dress; Kirk Ormand argues, “Pentheus’ feminization is the primary vehicle and onstage expression of his downfall. Having started the play as the fully masculine ruler of Thebes, he is dressed as a woman, concerned with his appearance, rendered passively powerless before the god, and the object of a derisive gaze from the Theban public.”55 Furthermore, when he has costumed himself in order to

54 Although there is a certain amount of metatheatricality inherent in a character in a play costuming himself, I would argue, pace Duncan (2001) 31 and Compton-Engle (2003) 523, that the female costumes of Mnesilochus and Pentheus are not meant as a comment on the artifice inherent in the fact that all female characters in both tragedy and comedy are played by men. Some have claimed that audience members would have been struck by the spectacle of Mnesilochus, a male character played by a male actor but impersonating a woman, arguing on Euripides’ behalf to a group of female characters who are all also played by male characters. I agree instead with Henderson (2002) 505: “In this case, the masks and costumes would indeed be mimetic and not transparent to the male performer underneath; when, as in Thesmo, the audience is made privy to a disguise, the identity of the character underneath remains stable. The fact that a male actor is playing a female role is never remarked, just as we are never made aware of the penis behind the comic phallus. In comedy, as in tragedy, female characters are always supposed to be women.”
blend in with the Bacchants,\textsuperscript{56} Pentheus begins to imagine that he has taken on Dionysiac powers; he believes that he can carry all of Cithaeron on his shoulders (945-6). Pentheus feels that by imitating a Bacchant he has acquired some of their superhuman strength that can tear cows limb from limb; as Agathon says in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, he believes that he has acquired by imitation what he did not inherently possess.

Through their transvestism, Mnesilochus and Pentheus both become, like Agathon, parodies of women. Although both are feminized over the course of their plays, they never fully become women;\textsuperscript{57} the genders begin to converge, but the essential distance between them remains, “[marking] difference rather than similarity”.\textsuperscript{58} In both plays, these gender parodies are simultaneously inextricable with generic appropriation. Agathon and Mnesilochus do not only dress as women; both imitate tragic heroines. Parody of women is combined with parody of tragedy. And since the \textit{Bacchae} imitates the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} so closely in its different varieties of transvestism, cross-dressing is always linked with comic appropriation. This link is strengthened by the ambiguous nature of the god whom the \textit{Bacchae} celebrates: Dionysus is an effeminate god who presides over both tragedy and comedy. The result of this connection is that transvestism in the \textit{Bacchae} causes characters to laugh at each other: when a man dresses up as a

\textsuperscript{56} As I argued above, Pentheus is not in fact dressed as a Bacchant, but as an ordinary woman. However, he does not seem aware of this discrepancy; in his view, he is imitating a Bacchant to the extent that he begins to feel like one.

\textsuperscript{57} Wohl (2005) 147 claims that for Pentheus, “the costume he assumes begins to inhabit him. Ultimately he resists this becoming: the scene ends with Pentheus reasserting his masculinity and singularity (962); he never does join the ecstatic dance of the bacchants and they, despite his costume, never mistake him for one of their own.”

\textsuperscript{58} Hutcheon (1985) 6.
woman, he creates comedy for the other characters.59

In the Thesmophoriazusae, the many different kinds of transvestism – Agathon’s imitation of a tragic heroine, Mnesilochus’ female garb, and Euripides’ madam costume – all serve practical purposes. By dressing as women, the men in the play are able to access something that they want, be it insight into the female psyche or admittance into the Thesmophoria. In the Bacchae, however, transvestism is meant solely to please Dionysus. The most effeminate aspects of the Stranger’s appearance that Pentheus complains about are his long hair, which is dedicated to the god (494), and the pale skin that he has kept out of the sun (458) because the god’s rites are primarily practiced at night (486). Pentheus’ female costume is also meant to please Dionysus; as I argued above, it serves no practical purpose within the play. Symbolically it connects him to sacrificial and Dionysiac ritual, but functionally its only role, according to the Stranger, is to gratify the god by punishing Pentheus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{χρήζω δὲ νῦν γέλωτα Θηβαῖοι ὀφλεῖν} \\
\text{γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δὲ ἄστεως} \\
\text{ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρὶν, αἰσὶ δεινὸς ἦν.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Bacchae 854-6)

I want him to be laughable to the Thebans, to pay for the earlier boasts which made him so terrible by being led through the town in women’s clothes.

This punishment takes an unusual form: Pentheus’ transvestism will please the god because it will

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59 Damen and Richards (2012) 361-2: “Although Euripides had experimented throughout his career with interweaving comic threads among his tragic tapestries, never to our knowledge did he cross the line this far, incorporating a plot device better attested in and more appropriate to Old Comedy, indeed, one that Aristophanes had recently deployed to excellent effect in the Thesmophoriazusae, a satire aimed directly at Euripides himself. Importing the same transvestism with which Aristophanes had derided him, the tragedian now turns the tables on his comic detractor, a person he surely imagined would be sitting in the audience at the premiere of the Bacchae, and fires back using the same weapon, not with the goal of humiliating a purported foe as Aristophanes had done, but rather to glorify and hymn the god who oversees both types of drama.”
make the king laughable.\textsuperscript{60}

The idea that dressing in an uncharacteristic manner would make Pentheus laughable (γέλωτα) echoes Pentheus’ reaction at his first entrance upon seeing Cadmus and Teiresias dressed as Dionyisciac initiates. Like Pentheus in his female Bacchant costume, the two old men dressed in the Bacchic uniform of fawnskins and thyrsoi present an incongruous image that makes them ridiculous to other characters in the play:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ἀτὰρ τὸδ᾽ ἄλλο τερασκόπων}

ἐν ποικιλαισι νεβρίσι Τειρεσίαν ὅρω

πατέρα τε μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς – πολὴν γέλων –

νάρθηκι βακχεύοντ᾽.
\end{quote}

\textit{(Bacchae 248-51)}

But I see another marvel, the seer Teiresias and my mother’s father dressed in dappled fawnskins – how laughable! – acting like Bacchants with a thyrsus.

Bernd Seidensticker uses the phrase πολὴν γέλων as evidence that the appearance of these two old men dressed as worshippers of the god would be perceived as amusing.\textsuperscript{61} However, Seidensticker does not discriminate between the effect of the costume on the play’s internal and external audiences, and humor in tragedy is difficult to pin down. Matthew Dillon, who argues,

\begin{quote}
March (1989) 60-1 argues that this is Pentheus’ primary punishment; his death is meant less to punish him than his mother Agave, who March argues was always the principal object of Dionysus’ revenge.

Seidensticker (1978) 315, although cf. Gregory (1999-2000) 66-7. Seidensticker’s most convincing point is that the elderliness of Cadmus and Teiresias is overstated for comic effect (p. 312). Foley (1985) 225 agrees with Seidensticker about the tone of the scene: “Cadmus and Teiresias gracelessly but strategically accept the worship of the god by donning his fawnskin and \textit{thursos} and adopting a hobbling dance. The ‘comedy’ of this scene centers on their fussy concern to play their new roles correctly. As often in comedy, the theatrical point lies in the lack of correspondence between the internal and the external, between the state of mind on one hand, and body and costume and movement on the other.” But Fisher (1992) 182 argues that there is no humor in the scene, and Papadopoulou (2001) 26 claims, “The controversy over the tone of the scene has not been resolved. The reason why a definite decision seems beyond reach is, I think, the fact that both receptions are equally possible. It is important to understand that they do not necessarily exclude, but, on the contrary, are meant to supplement each other. In other words, the tone of the scene is neither serious alone nor comic alone; it is deliberately controversial.”
\end{quote}
“There is nothing funny about laughter in Greek tragedy, as a study of gelos and its derivatives in drama clearly shows,”62 claims that Pentheus’ laughter is not caused by humor, but the mockery that leads to loss of face in a ‘shame culture.’63 The response evoked by Cadmus and Teiresias’ Dionysiac outfits seems more complex than mere comic relief,64 and the effect of Pentheus’ female costume is even more ambiguous, since it foreshadows his imminent demise.

Regardless of whether the audience would have found Pentheus’ transvestism laughable or disturbing, they may well have noticed its striking similarities to the cross-dressing scene in the Thesmophoriazusae. When Dionysus dresses Pentheus up as a woman in order to make him laughable, he creates a miniature comedy within the tragedy.65 That he does so by reenacting the costuming of Mnesilochus by Euripides and Agathon in the Thesmophoriazusae adds another layer of complexity. Just as in the Thesmophoriazusae, in the Bacchae too transgressions of gender are closely tied to transgressions of genre. Transvestism and comic appropriation are linked. When the characters in the play costume themselves in the clothes of the other gender, the play itself simultaneously appropriates from the other genre. However, as I argued above, the line between transvestism and feminization is in neither play clearly drawn. Often, when a man puts on the clothes of a woman, he begins to become more effeminate, narrowing the gap that had previously existed between mimesis and reality. Or, even more worryingly, when a man puts on female dress he might unwittingly reveal effeminate aspects of his nature that had always been present but had remained hidden. The fact that the essentially masculine nature of Mnesilochus

63 ibid. 347–8.
64 Kirkpatrick and Dunn (2002) 39 argue that the scene is “played out for laughs”. A more sensitive view, in my opinion, is that of Mendelsohn (2009) §2: “the old men’s dress-up game, their attempts at embracing bacchic abandon, stands uncomfortably at the intersection between comedy and tragedy.”
65 Muecke (1982b) 32 argues that the dressing scene is a tragic, not a comic trope.
and Pentheus is ultimately confirmed does not fully negate the disturbing consequences of this parodic fusion of genders.

III. “In vain would you bring original and clever plans to bear upon the foolish”

(Thesmophoriazusae 1130-1)

In her brilliant analysis of the Thesmophoriazusae, Froma Zeitlin argues for an essential connection in the play between transvestism and parody:

Just as the comic actor’s discrepancies between character and costume threaten his mimetic integrity, so does parody, in more complex and more extended fashion, address the critical questions of mimesis in the service of a fictive reality. The transvestite actor might succeed in concealing the tell-tale sign that marks him as an imitation with a difference, but parody, by its nature and its definition, is the literary device that openly declares its status as an imitation with a difference.66

As Zeitlin points out, transvestism in drama is itself a form of parody, an imitation with a difference of the other gender. In the Thesmophoriazusae these two forms of parody – parody of femininity and parody of tragedy – are intertwined, with parody of gender subordinated to parody of genre. The transvestites are tragedians (Agathon and Euripides) and Mnesilochus, who attempts to blend in with the women at the Thesmophoria by acting like a woman but ultimately is only able to pretend to be a Euripidean character: first Telephus, then briefly Palamedes, then Helen, and finally Andromeda. But extensive parody of the works of another author can have consequences for the parodying text, and the Thesmophoriazusae is no exception: in this play, parodic imitation becomes a transformative act. Even as it mocks Euripides’ tragedies, it subtly

turns Aristophanes’ play into a combination of comic and tragic structures. Agathon’s theory of mimesis is paradigmatic of the relationship between the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the works of Euripides: the interactions with various Euripidean texts serve as the ‘costumes’ that the play puts on to access tragedy, much as Agathon puts on female clothing to better understand his female characters. The result is a hybrid ending that combines traditional comic tropes with Euripidean escape-tragedy.

The *Thesmophoriazusae* is structured around parody of Euripidean tragedy. Although many of Euripides’ plays are referred to briefly, scenes from the *Telephus*, *Helen*, and *Andromeda* are acted out in detail. In the first half of the play, Mnesilochus seems generally to be playing the role of Telephus. Although he is dressed as a woman and not a beggar, he adopts his costume for the same reasons as Telephus and acts in a similar way. After his capture and the revelation of his true gender, however, Mnesilochus changes his tactics and begins to play the role of a heroine from one of Euripides’ recent escape-tragedies. While the first half of the play mimics the plot of the *Telephus*, the entire second half of the play, in a general way, resembles an escape-tragedy, with Euripides’ use of elaborate plans in his attempts to rescue Mnesilochus, and with the

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67 There is a strain of scholarship that claims that the *Helen* and *Andromeda* passages in *Thesmophoriazusae* are not really parodies at all, claiming that they lack the ‘difference’ or distortion that Hutcheon refers to – they are simply Euripidean scenes transplanted into an Aristophanic backdrop. See, for instance, Silk (1993) 494-5 and Epstein (2003) 6: “In fact, although many verses from the plays of Euripides are quoted verbatim, there is not one word of parody in them of Euripides’s plays. It is his attempt to apply scenes from his plays to everyday life that is shown to be ridiculous, not the plays themselves. The mere repetition of an author’s words does not constitute parody: they must in some obvious sense be held up to ridicule. *Mad Magazine* and the celebrated Alfred E. Newman seem to recognize this more clearly than Dover and Whitman.” Lelièvre (1954) 69, however, notes that a parodist can use the exact words (*ipsissima verba*) of the original and just apply them to an unintended circumstance. Much of the disagreement here seems to stem from differing definitions of the term ‘parody’. Regardless, the parodies here are more than mere echoes – a fact that is highlighted by the presence of an actual Echo onstage.

68 For a discussion of the *Palamedes* reference, which I argue is of lesser importance than these three major parodies, see below, p. 238-43.
Scythian Archer providing the seemingly necessary (or at least conventional) element of hostile barbarianism.69

The use of the Telephus and escape-tragedy is suggestive: the Telephus was Aristophanes’ favorite early Euripidean tragedy to mock,70 and escape-tragedy may have been a recent Euripidean innovation.71 Aristophanes seems to have chosen to incorporate into the structure of his comedy plays that were especially characteristic of Euripides’ tragic brand. The structural element of the similarities between the Thesmophoriazusae and the works of Euripides is significant because, in mimicking not only the content of a Euripidean escape-tragedy through parody but also its form, the comedy itself becomes more like a tragedy. The Thesmophoriazusae is filled with so many Euripidean references that it gradually comes to resemble the target of its own mockery. The degree of hybridization of Aristophanic comedy and Euripidean tragedy increases with each successive Euripidean parody.

The ramifications of the many resemblances between the Thesmophoriazusae and the Euripidean plays that it mocks have often been misunderstood as the opposite of what they mean. The second half of the Thesmophoriazusae imitates the general structure, and therefore the ending, of a Euripidean escape-tragedy, but many have mistakenly reversed the chronology and

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69 Hall (1989) 41-3. However, Hall argues that “the whole structure” of the play resembles an escape-tragedy, whereas I argue that only the second half follows this pattern. Hall explores the representation of the Scythian Archer more thoroughly in Hall (2006) 225-254.

70 Suggested in the Frogs, when Euripides says, “I swear by Zeus and Peleus and Aelous and Meleager and especially by Telephus” (καὶ νῦν Δία τῶν Πηλέα γε καὶ τῶν Αἴολον / καὶ τῶν Μελέαγρων κατὰ μάλα τῶν Τήλεφον, Frogs 863-4). It seems that, through Aristophanes’ repeated mockery of the Telephus, that tragedy and its hero had become emblematic of the larger intertextual relationship between the two playwrights.

71 Although lack of evidence forbids us from arguing with an certainty that the form was unique to Euripides, it certainly seems that Euripides’ Helen, IT, and Andromeda share specific, unique similarities, some of which also appear at the end of the Thesmophoriazusae, including a barbarian blocking figure and a problematic ‘escape’ into a situation that, when seriously considered, is nearly as perilous as the one being escaped from. For more on the escape-tragedy as a Euripidean form, see Wright (2005), especially pp. 48-60.
causality of this relationship. The so-called ‘happy endings’ of the Iphigeneia in Tauris, Helen, Andromeda, and other plays are wrongly used as evidence that, in this late stage in his career, Euripides was writing something more akin to comedy than to tragedy.\textsuperscript{72} This idea seems to condition the widely held view that the Thesmophoriazusae represents a battle between comedy and tragedy, staged on comedy’s turf. In this interpretation, Aristophanes felt that Euripides was encroaching on his domain with his recent ‘tragicomedies’, and the Thesmophoriazusae is a counter-attack meant to force the tragedian to retreat.\textsuperscript{73} Appealing though this idea may be, it seems that the opposite is the case. Rather than reacting to Euripides straying into the domain of comedy, the Thesmophoriazusae itself incorporates tragic content and structure so completely that the ending comes to resemble that of a recent Euripidean tragedy.

The first half of the Thesmophoriazusae (279-764) seems extensively indebted to Euripides’ Telephus. But, as I showed already in Chapter 2, the Telephus, which had now been originally performed 27 years earlier, was inextricably intertwined with the extensive parody of it in Aristophanes’ Acharnians. The Euripides scene in the Acharnians and the Agathon scene in the Thesmophoriazusae, as I have argued, share many suggestive similarities. Additionally, both the Thesmophoriazusae and the Acharnians interact extensively with Euripides’ Telephus: Dicaeopolis plays the role of Telephus to appropriate some of the tragic character’s eloquence.

\textsuperscript{72} Although Wright (2005) 223-5 problematizes the idea of the ‘happy ending’, pointing out that both Helen and Iphigeneia were carried by the gods away from Greece in order to rescue them, making the happiness of their returns far from certain.

\textsuperscript{73} Summarized beautifully in Gibert (1999-2000) 87: “Building on a long tradition which sees Aristophanes and Euripides as rivals, several scholars have recently suggested that in Thesmophoriazusae, Aristophanes ‘punishes’ Euripides for transgressions onto comic territory in his latest tragedies. Froma Zeitlin’s formulation of this idea, the earliest known to me, is in many ways also the subtlest. When she says that Aristophanes punishes Euripides, she does not mean that he easily wins the game of rivalry, and she insists on an ‘inextricable nexus of reciprocal trespass.’ (Zeitlin 1996, p. 398)… a less satisfactory form of the thesis is gaining currency. Euripides is said to ‘transgress’ by his use of language and illusion, and it is said or implied that when Aristophanes ‘punishes’ him, comedy emerges victorious over tragedy.” See also Tzanetou (2002) 330-1 and 355-7.
and convince the chorus not to kill him, and the entire first half of the *Thesmophoriazusae* seems modeled on the plot of that more than 25-year-old tragedy. Both comedies parody the *Telephus* hostage-taking scene, with Mnesilochus threatening a wineskin dressed as a baby girl and Dicaeopolis threatening a coal-scuttle. At this point the plays diverge, with the *Acharnians* plot moving toward the carnivalistic ending characteristic of Aristophanes’ early works while the *Thesmophoriazusae* continues in a more literary vein with further parodies of Euripides’ recent tragedies. Nevertheless, the plot arc that makes up the first third or so of both of these plays is astonishingly similar. And in light of the relationship between the *Telephus*, the *Acharnians*, and the *Helen* that I explore in my second chapter, it is remarkable that in the *Thesmophoriazusae* Aristophanes reuses elements of the *Acharnians* in a comedy that parodies both the *Telephus* and *Helen*; by appropriating from all of these plays, the *Thesmophoriazusae* dramatizes in miniature the textual dialogue between Aristophanes and Euripides.

The *Telephus* begins with the main character in disguise as a beggar, hoping to convince the Greeks not to invade Troy. His speech angers Agamemnon and Menelaus, and when Odysseus appears with information that there is an intruder in their midst, Telephus’ true identity is discovered. He then takes the baby Orestes hostage (having possibly colluded with Clytemnestra beforehand) and forces the Greeks to listen to another defense speech. Although he wins over some of the Greek army, Achilles remains unwilling to heal Telephus’ wound until

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74 Miller (1948) 174 claims to be the first to have noticed the extensive similarities between the two.

75 Taplin (1986) 172: “Comedy tends towards a united and celebratory ending, such as a victory or wedding procession. The *Oresteia* has that sort of conclusion; but in ‘classical’ tragedy, once comedy is established, they are avoided. Euripides’ later leaning towards such resolutions in his ‘escape-plays’ of 414 to 412 BC may have been one of the provocations of *Thesmophoriazousai*.”

76 Compton-Engle (2003) 516: “While we can never be sure whether Aristophanes specifically intended his audience to understand *Thesmophoriazusae* in light of *Acharnians*, nevertheless it is clear that he is reworking some of the same stage action into a far more complex drama.”

77 As in Chapter 2, I follow here the reconstruction of Heath (1987a).
Odysseus convinces him to do so.

The first half of the *Thesmophoriazusae* seems to track the plot of the *Telephus* quite closely. Mnesilochus also dresses up in order to infiltrate a hostile group and attempt to sway them to change their planned course of action. The women are horrified at his speech and are planning to depilate him (not realizing, of course, that Euripides has already done so as part of Mnesilochus’ female disguise) when Cleisthenes arrives and tells them about Euripides’ plot to send a male ally to infiltrate the festival. Mnesilochus’ true gender is discovered and he attempts to take Mica’s baby hostage, but the baby turns out to be a wineskin instead. At this point, the plot diverges from that of the *Telephus*, because Telephus succeeds in using his hostage to force the Greeks to hear his argument, whereas Mnesilochus’ hostage-taking is ineffectual. He is captured and arrested, and must be rescued by Euripides. The failure of Mnesilochus’ unmarked *Telephus* parody leads to the strongly marked parodies of recent Euripidean tragedies.

The *Telephus* parody in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is handled in a fundamentally different fashion than the other parodies in the play. In all of the other cases, Mnesilochus declares by name which play he is about to imitate.78 The name Telephus, however, is never uttered aloud. Instead, the *Telephus* is woven into the fabric of the play in a subtler manner. Martin Revermann argues that the audience would not have even realized how similar the plot of the play was to the *Telephus* until the parody of the now-famous hostage scene. After the *Telephus* is evoked with such a powerful visual reminiscence, the audience members familiar with it would have realized

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78 ἐγὼ καὶ δὴ πόρον / ἐκ τοῦ Παλαμήδους (769-70); τὴν κακὴν Ἑλένην μιμήσομαι (850); ἀνὴρ ἕοκεν οὐ προδώσαν, ἀλλὰ μοι / σημεῖον ὑπεδήλωσε Περσεὺς ἐκδραμὼν; / ὅτι δὲ ἔμε γέγνεσθ’ Ἀνδρομέδαν (1010-2).
that the entire plot up to that point had been imitating the *Telephus* as well.⁷⁹ Revermann contrasts this subtle use of Euripides’ play with the *Acharnians*, where the interaction with the *Telephus* is signposted more clearly.⁸⁰

Although I find much of Revermann’s analysis compelling, I would argue with this assertion on two minor points. First, in the *Acharnians*, the scene in which Dicaeopolis takes the coal-scuttle hostage in a blatant parody of the *Telephus* does not mention the tragedy at all; it is only after, when Dicaeopolis takes the costume from Euripides, that Telephus is explicitly mentioned (430). Perhaps the hostage scene would have seemed paratragic, but the allusion to Euripides would not have been clear until Dicaeopolis chose Telephus’ rags.⁸¹ Revermann is incorrect, therefore, in arguing that the interaction with the *Telephus* is clearly indicated by Aristophanes throughout the *Acharnians*. But this lack of a clearly stated referent makes the *Acharnians* even more similar to the *Thesmophoriazusae*, since in both plays the involvement of the *Telephus* at the beginning is unstated and difficult to notice. Additionally, by contrasting the *Acharnians* with the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Revermann disregards the extensive similarities between the plays that are apparent even before Mnesilochus takes Mica’s wineskin-baby hostage. The scenes where Dicaeopolis visits Euripides and where Euripides visits Agathon are noticeably similar. For this reason, a few of the audience members might have been more likely to notice the connection with the *Telephus* earlier in the play, even before the hostage scene would have clued in a greater proportion of the viewers to the subtle *Telephus* plot imitation, since the *Thesmophoriazusae* resembles the *Acharnians* and the *Acharnians* extensively and

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⁷⁹ Revermann (2006b) 116: “Note further that the structural affinity becomes fully apparent only with the hindsight of the hostage-taking scene which articulates a link that had been latently operative all along.”

⁸⁰ Revermann (2006b) 116.

⁸¹ Foley (1988) 35 points out that Lamachus’ wounding of his foot at the end of the *Acharnians* might also be a nod to the *Telephus*. Like the hostage scene, it is unmarked.
explicitly parodies the *Telephus*.

Mnesilochus uses the role of Telephus somewhat differently from Dicaeopolis, but there are distinct similarities between all three characters. Although Dicaeopolis’ primary goal is to subsume the tragic character’s eloquence by imitating his appearance, Mnesilochus aims to copy Telephus’ tactics of using a costume to enter a hostile environment unnoticed. While the loss of the *Telephus* means that it is impossible to tell how closely Dicaeopolis’ and Mnesilochus’ respective speeches were modeled after Telephus’ impassioned defense of the Trojans, it seems certain that all three share broad similarities, including a tendency to blame women for causing problems.\(^{82}\) Mnesilochus even ends his speech with a quotation from the *Telephus*, a sure sign that the earlier Euripidean character was his model for how best to play his role as Euripides’ spy.\(^{83}\)

After his plan to defend Euripides through persuasion has failed, Mnesilochus’ primary focus becomes escaping his own imminent danger; Euripides’ salvation falls temporarily by the wayside. The basic strategy, however, remains the same: to copy situations and characters from Euripides’ plays in the hopes of copying their outcomes. Indeed, at this point the incorporation of Euripidean material becomes even more extensive; instead of mimicking Telephus, Mnesilochus switches to acting out scenes from Euripides’ escape-tragedies performed in the

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\(^{82}\) For a discussion about whether the *Telephus*’ defense of the Trojans would have featured a similar reciprocal abduction argument to that in Herodotus (and, in fact, influenced by Herodotus), see Fornara (1971) 25–34. In the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis argues that the reciprocal abduction of prostitutes was what set off the war between Athens and Megara (523–34), and obviously in the *Thesmophoriazusae* the blameworthiness of women is crucial to Mnesilochus’ argument. Rau (1967) 46 denies that Mnesilochus’ speech is as a whole a Euripidean parody, but his is the minority view.

\(^{83}\) Mnesilochus ends his speech by saying, κἂν ἕως θυμοῖμεθα ὁδὲν παθοῦσαι μεῖξον ἢ δεδράκαμεν (And we are angry at Euripides, although we have suffered no worse than we deserve? 518–9). This could not be a clearer reworking of *Telephus* fr. 711: εἶτα δὴ θυμοῖμεθα / παθόντες ὁδὲν μεῖξον ἢ δεδράκότες;
previous year, the *Helen* and the *Andromeda*. The difference between acting out the *Telephus* as opposed to the *Helen* and *Andromeda*, however, is a substantial one, requiring very different treatment on the part of the comedian. The *Telephus*, as I mentioned above, was by 411 a fairly old play. Aristophanes’ frequent parodying of the play might have kept it somewhat fresh in the minds of the audience, but they could hardly be expected to recall extensive verbal parallels. The echoes, therefore, are primarily situational. The audience would have been much more conversant with the *Helen* and *Andromeda*, performed only one year before. The fact that these plays were so much more recent allowed Aristophanes to expect a higher level of comprehension in his audience and to engage much more deeply with the plays.\(^{84}\) This detailed and specific interaction with Euripides’ texts contributes to the convergence between Aristophanic and Euripidean elements that characterizes the *Thesmophoriazusae*.

The closer use of the Euripidean texts is signaled in two ways. Before the *Helen* parody, Mnesilochus makes use of a brief device from Euripides’ *Palamedes*, a play that was deeply concerned with issues of writing and textuality. The reference to the *Palamedes* marks a shift in Aristophanes’ treatment of the Euripidean tragedies from which he appropriates. After Mnesilochus begins to play Palamedes, he becomes far more interested in interacting with and manipulating the texts of the tragedies, borrowing whole lines and speeches rather than generally imitating scenes. This increasing reliance on Euripidean texts is also highlighted when, in the middle of the *Andromeda* parody, Aristophanes brings in Echo, a character with seemingly no function other than to annoy others by copying their words. Echo’s interaction with Mnesilochus and the Scythian Archer could be seen as a microcosm of the relationship between Aristophanes

\(^{84}\) Revermann (2006b) 103 points out that, ironically, as the audience’s comprehension of the parodies in the *Thesmophoriazusae* increases, the comprehension of the characters onstage decreases (117).
and Euripides’ texts: as I will argue, Echo shows that repeating somebody’s own words back to
them in a different context can be highly irritating, forming an attractive parallel with
Aristophanes’ extensive parodies of Euripides’ tragedies. The Palamedes reference and the
extensive use of Echo mark the shift from the Telephus parody to parodies that engage far more
closely with Euripides’ plays on a verbal, textual level.

Although the Telephus parody differs from the others in not mentioning by name the
tragedy it draws from, one could also argue, as Zeitlin has done, that the Palamedes strategy
resembles it more closely than it does the Helen and Andromeda parodies. In the first two,
Mnesilochus plays the part of a male character who tries to take an active role in his own rescue.
In the latter two, he plays the role of a passive female, almost a damsel in distress, who needs to
be rescued by a male character played by Euripides.85 Zeitlin points out that the two pairs are
separated neatly by the parabasis.86 Although this idea is attractive, I think that it is misleading to
place the brief Palamedes reference on the same level as the far more extensive parodies of the
Telephus, Helen, and Andromeda. Instead, the Palamedes stratagem plays a minor but still crucial
role, separating the interaction with Euripides’ tragedies in the Thesmophoriazusae into two
halves: a half that closely follows the plot of the Telephus, and a half that both parodies and is
structurally similar to Euripides’ recent escape-tragedies, including the Helen, Andromeda, and
perhaps even the Iphigeneia in Tauris.87

If the Thesmophoriazusae’s interaction with Euripides’ works is split into two halves, a
Telephus half and an escape-tragedy half, then the reference to the Palamedes seems out of place,

85 Zeitlin (1981) 313. She also argues (324-5) that the choice of both the Palamedes and the Helen is an
oblique reference to Gorgias, who wrote defense speeches for the main characters of both plays and is
briefly mentioned by the Scythian Archer when he misunderstands a reference to the Gorgon.
86 ibid.
a minor, throwaway moment lost in the shuffle of three far more prominent parodies.

Furthermore, it is unclear what role Mnesilochus thinks he is playing: is he Palamedes himself, or Oeux, Palamedes’ brother and the character who actually used the oar-blade strategy in the original play? Neither fits perfectly. To complicate matters further, Oeux used the writing on the oars not to alert someone that he needed rescuing, as Mnesilochus does, but rather as a sort of message in a bottle that he hoped would reach his father Nauplius and let him know that Palamedes had been executed. The trick did eventually fulfill this purpose, leading Nauplius to take revenge on the returning Greek ships after the war concluded, but Mnesilochus is in need of rescue, not revenge. His stratagem plays an important structural role in the Thesmophoriazusae, since it brings Euripides back into the action, but it is difficult to see why Aristophanes chose to use the Palamedes as the hinge that separates the parody of the Telephus from that of the Helen and Andromeda.

The degree of interaction with the text of Euripides’ play rather than just its plot and characters differentiates the use of the Telephus from the use of the Helen and Andromeda. In the Acharnians, the Telephus is quoted, or nearly so, several times. Dicaeopolis’ defense speech also seems to have resembled Telephus’ defense in structure. In the Thesmophoriazusae, however, the

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88 We know very little of the plot of the Palamedes. The problems are outlined in Koniaris (1973) 87-8 and n. 13 and Scodel (1980) 43. We have little of the play outside of a handful of literary quotations. Further complicating our reading of the already-limited evidence, it is clear that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Astydamas all also wrote plays about Palamedes, and several wrote plays about his father Nauplius as well. Scodel sifts through the evidence to come up with a reasonably convincing conjectural outline of the play (55-62), and I follow her description.
89 Sommerstein (1994) ad loc. gives Mnesilochus the benefit of the doubt, but admits that the grammar allows for him to have mixed up which of the two brothers wrote on the oars.
90 Although the text allows for some uncertainty about whether it was truly the tablets that informed Euripides, or whether he found out in some other way (846-51).
91 See, for example, Acharnians 440-1, discussed in Chapter 2.
interaction with the text of the *Telephus* is surprisingly limited.\(^\text{92}\) The plots of the two plays have extensive similarities, but the engagement is more on the level of situations and characters rather than the manipulation of lines. The *Helen* parody, on the other hand, happens almost exclusively at the level of the Euripidean text. What separates Mnesilochus acting like Telephus from his quoting almost exactly several lines from the opening of the *Helen* is his use of a trick from the *Palamedes*: writing. The use of the *Palamedes* signals the increased textuality of Aristophanes’ appropriation of Euripides in a play that is fundamentally about the influence that mocking Euripides has had on Aristophanes’ comedies.

Although our knowledge of the *Palamedes* is limited, it is clear that it was a play in which writing played an unusually crucial thematic and structural role.\(^\text{93}\) Palamedes is sometimes considered the mythological inventor of writing,\(^\text{94}\) and Stobaeus quotes his boast about all the benefits that writing has brought to man:\(^\text{95}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\tau\alpha\tau\eta\acute{s} & \; \gamma\epsilon \; \lambda\acute{i}\theta\eta\varsigma \; \phi\acute{a}\acute{r}m\acute{a}k\acute{e} \; \acute{o}r\theta\acute{h}\omega\acute{s} \varsigma \; \mu\acute{o}n\acute{o}s, \\
\acute{a}f\omega\nu\acute{a} \; \phi\omega\nu\acute{n}\acute{e}n\acute{t}a \; \sigma\upsilonl\lambda\acute{a}b\acute{a}s \; \tau\acute{i}b\acute{e}i\acute{s} \\
\acute{e}\acute{x}\acute{e}\acute{h}\acute{\iota}\acute{r}\acute{o} \; \acute{\alpha}n\theta\acute{r}\acute{w}\acute{o}p\acute{o}i\acute{a} \; \gamma\acute{r}\acute{\alpha}\acute{m}\acute{m}\acute{a}t\acute{a} \acute{'} \; \acute{e}\acute{d}\acute{e}n\acute{a}i, \\
\acute{\omega}\acute{\sigma}t \; \acute{o}\upsilon \; \pi\acute{a}r\acute{o}\nu\acute{t}a \; \pi\upsilon\nu\acute{t}a\acute{s} \; \acute{\upsilon}\acute{p}e\acute{r} \; \pi\acute{l}a\acute{k}\acute{o}\acute{s} \\
\tau\acute{a}k\acute{e}i \; \kappa\acute{a}t \; \acute{\omicron}\acute{\iota}k\acute{u}\acute{s} \; \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{t} \; \acute{\epsilon}\acute{p}\acute{\iota}\acute{\sigma}\acute{t}a\acute{s}t\acute{a} \kappa\acute{a}l\acute{\omega}s, \\
p\acute{i}a\acute{i}a\acute{n} \; \tau \; \acute{\alpha}p\acute{\omicron}\theta\acute{h}\acute{\iota}\acute{h}\acute{\acute{s}}\acute{k}\acute{o}n\acute{t}a \; \chi\acute{r}\acute{h}\acute{m}\acute{a}t\acute{o}n \; \mu\acute{e}\acute{t}r\acute{o}n \\
gr\acute{a}\acute{f\omega}n\acute{a}t\acute{a} \; \acute{e}\acute{i}\acute{p}e\acute{\acute{e}}\acute{\acute{w}}, \; \tau\acute{\omega}n \; \lambda\acute{a}b\acute{\omega}\acute{\eta} \; \acute{\delta} \; \acute{e}\acute{d}\acute{e}n\acute{a}i. \\
\acute{\alpha} \; \acute{\delta} \; \acute{\epsilon}\acute{i}\acute{s} \; \acute{\epsilon}\acute{r}n \; \pi\acute{\pi}\acute{\tau}t\acute{t}o\acute{n}a\acute{v} \; \acute{\alpha}n\theta\acute{r}\acute{o}\acute{p}o\acute{i} \; \kappa\acute{a}k\acute{a} \; \delta\acute{e}\acute{l}t\acute{o}s \; \delta\acute{i}\acute{a}r\acute{e}i, \; \kappa\acute{o}\upsilon \; \acute{\epsilon}\acute{i} \; \acute{\psi}\acute{e}u\acute{d}h\acute{\eta} \; \acute{\lambda}\acute{\acute{e}}\acute{g}\acute{e}i. \\
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{\text{92}}\) Austin and Olson (2004) lvi-iii. There are, of course, exceptions, including the last few lines of Mnesilochus’ speech at the Thesmophoria. However, compared to the textual engagement with the *Helen* and *Andromeda*, the text of the *Telephus* plays a relatively lesser role.

\(^{\text{93}}\) This is fairly unusual in tragedy. One of the only other extant plays in which writing plays such a crucial role is Phaedra’s note in the *Hippolytus*, also a play that is heavily implicated in the *Thesmophoriazusae*: see Mueller (2011) on the role of Phaedra’s *deltos* as a defixio and seemingly incontrovertible proof to ensure her victory in the argument over her chastity. Although the fact that both of these writing-heavy plays are mentioned in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is likely a coincidence, it is an interesting one.

\(^{\text{94}}\) The other mythological inventor of writing was Cadmus.

\(^{\text{95}}\) Fr. 578 Nauck, quoted in Stobaeus 2.4.8.
I alone invented the cure for forgetfulness, setting forth syllables which are unvoiced and yet speak I invented writing for men’s knowledge, so that when they are absent and across the plain of the sea they might yet know well what is happening at home, and so that, whenever a man dies, having written down the measure of his wealth he might tell it to his children, and each child will know what to take. And those evils that make men come to strife, a tablet takes these away, for it does not permit the telling of lies.

This last claim is challenged within the play itself, since Odysseus’ first fabricated piece of evidence that Palamedes is a traitor is a forged letter from Priam planted in Palamedes’ tent. But Palamedes is proven correct in the end about the potential utility of writing as a means of overseas communication, since later in the play his brother Oeax successfully writes a message to their father on oars to tell him what has befallen his son. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the Palamedes, the main character is defined by his relationship with writing: it is his prized invention, the tool used by his enemy to destroy him, and the eventual means of his family’s revenge on the Greek army.96

The reference to the Palamedes in the Thesmophoriazusae also occurs through the medium of the written word. Although Ruth Scodel argues that it is unlikely that Oeax actually inscribed the oar-blades onstage in the Palamedes,97 in the Thesmophoriazusae the audience does see Mnesilochus scribbling on the votive tablets, cursing at the difficulty of scratching on wood,

96 And, Kovacs (1997) 169 points out, also the means by which Palamedes’ innocence is passed down for posterity.
97 Scodel (1980) 58, although to support this claim Scodel cites scholars who claim that Aristophanes often parodies scenes that were only narrated in the originals, such as the hostage-taking scene in the Telephus. While I agree that Oeax may not have inscribed the oars onstage, I suspect that the hostage scene in the original Telephus was in fact performed and not narrated; see Heath (1987a) 275.
complaining about how bad his rho looks (780-1).\footnote{Incidentally, we have no idea what precisely Mnesilochus is attempting to write here; see Austin and Olson (2004) \textit{ad loc}. Vickers (1989) argues, rather implausibly, that this reference to an unclear rho implies that Euripides’ kinsman is meant to represent Alcibiades, who also hailed from Salamis and was known for his lisp.} When Aristophanes switches from the more general parody of the \textit{Telephus} to the textually based parody of the \textit{Helen} and the \textit{Andromeda}, he does so by drawing from a Euripidean tragedy that was fundamentally about the power and danger of the written word and by parodying a specific moment in the play in which he can reproduce the act of writing on the comic stage.

The parody of the \textit{Helen}, which begins almost immediately after the \textit{parabasis} and Mnesilochus’ admission that his \textit{Palamedes} trick may have failed,\footnote{Zeitlin (1981) 313 argues that the \textit{Helen} parody is given a prominent position in the play, placed as it is between the \textit{parabasis} and Mnesilochus’ brief removal from the stage.} is unmistakably a parody that relies on extensive study of the tragedy’s text. Aristophanes draws from several separate scenes in the play – Helen’s prologue speech, the entrances of Teucer and Menelaus, Menelaus’ conflict with the gatekeeper of Theoclymenus’ palace, and the recognition scene between Menelaus and Helen – to create a condensed, miniaturized version of the \textit{Helen} that fits with the circumstances of the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}. Gian Franco Nieddu calculates that about a third of the parody is made up of lines that are reproduced exactly from the Euripidean original, with 7\% more that are slightly modified from the original and 57\% that are a pastiche of Euripidean style. He concludes, “What clearly emerges from all this is above all the considerable presence of the lines taken up literally, in other words the care with which Aristophanes transfers ‘fragments’ of the tragic text into his text, displaying a textual fidelity which indicates an attitude of attention and, as it were,
respect towards the original.”

By imitating so closely not only the structure and themes but even the text of Euripides’ recent tragedy, Aristophanes begins to erode the distinction between parody and hybridization.

The opening of the parody, in particular, constitutes an exact reproduction of the first two lines of the Helen, but then introduces an unexpected (para prosdokian) comic element at the end of the third line:

```greek
Νείλου μὲν αἰδε καλλιπάρθενοι ῥοάι,
ὅς ἀντὶ δίας ψακάδος Αἰγύπτου πέδων
λευκῆς νοτίζει μελανοσυρμαίον λεών.

(Thesmo. 855-7)
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These are the shores of the Nile with their beautiful virgins, the river which instead of raindrops fertilizes the land of white Egypt, with its black people who are fond of purges.

Even this reference to the Egyptians’ affinity for laxatives, while decidedly non-tragic in tone, fits with the Euripidean original. Euripides’ line was λευκῆς τακείσης χιόνος ύγραίνει γύας ([the Nile] hydrates the lands after the white snow has melted, Helen 3), a popular dramatic etiology for the Nile’s flooding that had been roundly rebutted by Herodotus. Perhaps Euripides felt that it would have been anachronistic for Helen to be too cognizant of intellectual works from fifth-century Athens. The characters in Aristophanes’ comedy, however, have no such restrictions. When Mnesilochus calls Egypt a land “with black people who are fond of purges”,

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100 Nieddu (2004) 338. His use of the phrase “as it were” to qualify the idea that Aristophanes might be showing ‘respect’ for Euripides’ text is characteristic of the greater trend in the scholarship toward assuming that Aristophanes is in competition with Euripides.

101 Allan (2008) ad loc. Allan points out that the etiology in the Helen here is already at Aeschylus Suppliants 559. Herodotus 2.20-4 rebuts the three most widely held etiologies of the flooding of the Nile, including that it was caused by the Etesian winds or the circumambient ocean, but he calls the poetic etiology “The most plausible and the falsest” (ἡ δὲ τρίτη τῶν οἷῶν πολλῶν ἐπιεικεστάτη ἕνώσα μάλιστα ἔφευσται, 2.22).
the ethnographic insertion seems to replace Euripides’ subtle rejection of the historian’s argument with a direct reference to Herodotus’ work:  

τρόπῳ δὲ ζώης τοιῶδε διαχρέωνται: συρμαίζουσι τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἐπεξής μηνὸς ἑκάστου, ἐμέτοικαι θηρώμενοι τὴν υγείαν καὶ κλύσμασι, νομίζουσι ἀπὸ τῶν τριφώντων σιτίων πάσας τὰς νούσους τοίαν ἀνθρώπους γίνεσθαι.

(Histories 2.77.2)

They pursue this way of life: for three days out of every month they purge themselves, hunting down health with emetics and washes, since they believe that men contract all illnesses from food.

This advanced level of manipulation of Euripides’ text while simultaneously drawing on contemporary intellectual debate would not have been out of place in works from the Hellenistic era.

The degree of subtlety involved in Aristophanes’ treatment of the text of the Helen is also evident in the characters’ discussion of the staging, particularly surrounding the altar of Dionysus. In the context of the Thesmophoriazusae, Dionysus’ altar temporarily serves as the altar of the Thesmophoroi, while in the Helen, it was Proteus’ tomb. Instead of smoothing over the possible confusion about the function of this focal point in the theater, Aristophanes seems to delight in emphasizing the tension in the different characters’ use of their surroundings:

ΕΥ: αἰαὶ τέθνηκε, ποῦ δ᾽ ἔτυμβεύθη τάφῳ;  
ΚΗ: τὸδ᾽ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ σῆμ᾽, ἐφ᾽ ὧ καθήμεθα.  
Κριτύλλα: κακῶς τ᾽ ἀρ᾽ ἔξολοιο, κάξολεῖ γέ τοι, ὃστις γε τολμᾷς σήμα τὸν βωμὸν καλεῖν.

(Thesmo. 885-8)

Euripides: Alas, then [Proteus] is dead. Where is he entombed?  
Mnesilochus: This stone where I sit is his sepulcher.  
Critylla: You’ll be damned for daring to call an altar a tomb!

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102 The Egyptian fondness for purges is also mentioned at Aristophanes’ Peace 1253-4.
Throughout most of the scene, Critylla’s primary emotion seems to be irritation at Mnesilochus’ ‘lies’, so her outrage here suggests that in the normal course of Athenian life, referring to an altar as a tomb would have been fairly scandalous. But this little bit of stage-business is more complicated than it first appears, for in a particularly tense moment in the Helen, Menelaus questions why Helen has chosen to take sanctuary at Proteus’ tomb and effectively use it as an altar (Helen 800). It appears that in the original Helen, Euripides himself played with the idea that the actual physical altar of the theater, which the audience was temporarily asked to imagine represented a tomb, was still in some way playing an altar-like role. For Aristophanes to reinvoke the confusion between altar and tomb here draws the audience’s attention to the complicated relationship between the physical setting of the Theater of Dionysus, the comic setting of the Thesmophoriazusae, and the parodic setting of the Helen.\footnote{Hutcheon (1985) 14-5 uses the term ‘trans-contextualization’ to describe this kind of parody.} Critylla’s outrage, on the other hand, fits with her complete failure to recognize dramatic mimesis, since she is angry that Mnesilochus calls an altar a tomb despite the fact that this transposition was relatively normal in tragedy.\footnote{Rehm (1988) 263-307; Aeschylus’ Choephoroe 106 is one such notable example. Sommerstein (1994) ad 689-758 notes that the altar would have already been used for supplication in the Telephus parody.} The subtlety of the interaction with Euripides’ text is far beyond her meager understanding.

Critylla’s failure to recognize tragic mimesis remains a constant that provides much of the humor throughout the scene.

Many of the original scenes from Euripides’ Helen condensed here into a single parodic sequence are stichomythiae between two characters: Helen and Teucer, Menelaus and the gatekeeper, Helen and Menelaus. In Aristophanes’ version, however, a third character is added. Critylla has been set as temporary guard over Mnesilochus until the Magistrate and Scythian
Archer arrive, and her complete lack of comprehension keeps her from losing touch with reality and being drawn into the Helen parody. Euripides and Mnesilochus try to artificially create the setting of the Helen primarily through questions and answers: Euripides asks whose house they are in front of (871-3), who Proteus is and where he is (874, 881), what country they are in (877), why Mnesilochus is sitting where he is (889-90), who Critylla is (896), who Mnesilochus is (905), and where he is from (907). Mnesilochus answers in character, with lines adapted to various degrees from Euripides’ original: they are in front of Proteus’ house (874) in Egypt (878), although Proteus himself is dead and they are in fact at his tomb (886). Critylla is Theonoe, Proteus’ daughter (897), and he himself is Helen, from Greece (908). Critylla’s primary role, throughout the scene, is to refute Mnesilochus’ responses and instead provide the actual answers to Euripides’ questions. Euripides and Mnesilochus attempt first to ignore her, then to incorporate her into the scene in the role of Theonoe, but fail both times. This is not the only time throughout the play where Euripides’ mimetic powers are challenged; direct imitation of tragedy proves far less effective than creative generic fusion.

Until Euripides tries to take Mnesilochus away, then acts falsely outraged that Critylla would try to thwart the reunion of husband and wife, Critylla is surprisingly willing to provide him with information. Euripides is clothed in the tattered remains of a sail and perhaps even draped in seaweed,\(^\text{105}\) and Critylla seems to take his identity as a shipwrecked sailor for granted. She even generously decides to attribute Euripides’ obvious confusion to the fact that he is still

\(^{105}\) I find the interpretation of \(\epsilon\kappa\ τ\omega\ ν\ ιφύον\ 910\) in Austin and Olson (2004) more satisfactory than that of Sommerstein (1994), who sees it as merely a reference to Euripides’ mother’s alleged occupation as a vegetable-seller.
When she intercedes to stop their escape, Euripides is forced to withdraw, but not without reassuring Mnesilochus that he has an infinite number of tricks up his sleeve, saying, “I will never betray you, so long as I breathe and have my myriad schemes” (οὐ γὰρ προδώσω σ’ οὐδέποτ’, ἥντερ ἐμπνέω, / ἢν μὴ προλίπωσ’ αἰ μυρίαι με μηχαναί, 926-7).

The unsuccessful attempt to free Mnesilochus using a parody of the Helen is followed by an equally unsuccessful attempt using a parody of the Andromeda. The use of parody, however, has undergone a subtle shift: although the Andromeda parody still makes extensive use of the text of the original Euripidean play, greater effort is made to fit the parody to not only the circumstances but also the tone of the Thesmophoriazusae. The hybridization of tragic and comic material continues, but the former is more subordinated to the latter than it was in the Helen parody. This trend will continue in the ending, where the tropes of escape-tragedy are entirely assimilated into comic convention.

By the time of the Andromeda parody, Mnesilochus’ situation has changed significantly. Instead of being merely watched over by Critylla, he is physically bound to a plank and guarded closely by a brutish Scythian Archer. The dynamic between Euripides and Mnesilochus has also changed: while Mnesilochus himself chose to make use of the Telephus, Palamedes, and Helen, he has by now relinquished control. It is Euripides who chooses the Andromeda as their next device, and he merely signals to Mnesilochus that he should start acting like the heroine of that play. How this signal takes place, however, is the subject of much debate. Although the most literal translation of Mnesilochus’ line οὐ γὰρ ἂν παρέπτετο (1014) would be that Euripides does a quick fly-by on the mēchanē in Perseus’ costume, it seems this interpretation would be

106 Austin and Olson (2004) ad 882 note that Critylla’s address is surprisingly respectful; one might, perhaps, see this interaction as part of the larger theme explored in Chapter 2 of using ragged costumes to elicit sympathy in internal audiences.
impossible to stage, so the main argument concerns whether Euripides briefly appeared and disappeared again, or whether the audience must imagine that Mnesilochus has seen something that they have not.\textsuperscript{107} Implicated in this debate is the question of whether Echo would have been played by Euripides and where onstage Echo would have been. While it makes little sense for Echo to have been played by anyone aside from Euripides, it is difficult to imagine how to stage Euripides’ entrance as Perseus, his interlude as Echo, and then re-entrance as Perseus on the mēchanē.\textsuperscript{108} It is likely that the extensive debate over the staging of the Andromeda parody has its roots in our basic lack of knowledge about the Euripidean original. With the Helen parody, the preservation of the original text has allowed for greater understanding of how Aristophanes manipulated that text to achieve certain effects. With the Andromeda parody, only educated guesswork is possible.

Mnesilochus takes up Euripides’ cue to act like Andromeda by singing a 40-line song. Lacking the complete text of the Andromeda, it is impossible to say how closely this song was modeled on the original, but it seems that Mnesilochus has condensed much of the opening of the play into a monologue and adapted it to better fit his circumstances. Instead of copying the words of the Andromeda directly, Aristophanes seems to have created a pastiche of original Euripidean text, high tragic style, and intermittent colloquialisms that fit with the primarily

\textsuperscript{107} Austin and Olson (2004) argue that Euripides briefly darted in from eisodos A and then exited via the skênē door, while Sommerstein (1994) argues that he would not have appeared at all and we are merely meant to imagine that Mnesilochus has seen him. Hansen (1976) 180-1 argues that Euripides would have darted in and out of the skênē. Frankly, there is not much evidence to prefer any of these interpretations over the others.

\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, Hansen (1976) 181-3 argues that a costume change would be impossible. He does cite the argument of Wilamowitz (1929) 468 that there would have been a brief pause to allow Euripides to change costume, but dismisses it as both impractical in terms of staging and unlikely in light of the Archer’s apparent inability to see Echo. Hansen suggests that Euripides appears at 1056 dressed already as Perseus on the mēchanē and speaks in a falsetto as Echo. Major (2013) 399 argues that Echo and Euripides were both played by the deuteragonist, but that Euripides did not himself play the role of Echo.
iambic meter. For instance, in reference to the Scythian Archer, Mnesilochus bemoans,

“Pitiless was he who bound me, and I am the most mournful of men” (ἀνοικτός ὦ μ’ ἔδησε τὸν / 
πολυστονώτατον βροτῶν, 1022-3). In the Euripidean original, either Echo or the Chorus had 
said to Andromeda, ἀνοικτός ὦ τεκὼν σὲ τὴν πολυπονωτάτην βροτῶν.10 To fit the line better 
to his situation, Mnesilochus has changed the verb and also made the object first person. Here, 
Mnesilochus refers to himself in the masculine, as τὸν πολυστονώτατον βροτῶν. Throughout the 
song, he switches back and forth between masculine and feminine pronouns.11 He describes his 
bondage, “bound up in many fetters I am laid out as a feast for the sea-monster Glaucetes” (ἐν 
πυκνοῖς δεσμοῖσιν ἐμπεπλεγμένη / κήτε βορὰ Γλαυκέτη πρόκειμαι, 1032-3). The use of the 
feminine participle ἐμπεπλεγμένη suggests that he might be quoting, or nearly so, from the 
Euripidean text, but then he jarringly introduces the name of Glaucetes, a contemporary 
Athenian known for his gluttony.12 The degree and sophistication of the textual manipulation 
seems comparable to the interaction with the text of the Helen, with a slightly greater concern 
toward fitting the Euripidean original to the context of the Thesmophoriazusae. There seems to be 
a trend toward greater contextualization of tragic material that ends with Euripides’ successful 
manipulation of the Scythian Archer.

The Andromeda parody continues with the entrance of Echo. In the Euripidean original, 
Echo may have been one of the play’s most distinctive features. She engaged in a long duet with

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109 cf. Gibert (1999-2000) 80, who claims that much of the parody is improvisation on the plot of the 
original and Euripides’ style.
110 Sommerstein (1994) ad loc. points out that Cepheus, Andromeda’s father, was also responsible for her 
being bound, so ἔδησε would have been appropriate in the original as well.
111 Sommerstein (1994) ad 1015 argues that the shifting gender with which Mnesilochus refers to himself is 
“by no means co-ordinated with his shifts in and out of role.” 
112 Glaucetes was also mocked for his gluttony at Peace 1008. Sommerstein (1994) points out that his name 
could be taken as meaning something like “from the sea”, making his use here more appropriate.
Andromeda, but never appeared onstage. All of her lines would have been sung from offstage, audible to Andromeda and the audience without any physical presence, similar to Medea’s cries at the beginning of the Medea. Finally, Andromeda asks Echo to leave her to grieve in peace (albeit more politely than Mnesilochus makes his similar request in the Thesmophoriazusae). It makes perfect sense that Aristophanes would wish to include in his parody one of the aspects of the Andromeda that was the most memorable. What is less clear, unfortunately, is how precisely this mockery would have taken place. Scholars disagree widely about whether Echo was played by Euripides, and, indeed, whether Echo would have been visible onstage at all, or merely voiced offstage as in the Euripidean original. Even among those who agree that Echo would have been physically present onstage, there is disagreement as to her location: would she have been on the roof of the skênê, or otherwise hidden somehow? Mnesilochus seems to see Echo, but at first the Scythian Archer does not. In fact, he thinks initially that the person mocking him by repeating his words is Mnesilochus himself, and he must be told that there is a third individual involved (1089-90).

While the details of Echo’s presence onstage are much debated, her purpose in appearing in the play at all is equally unclear. When Mnesilochus asks her who she is and what she is doing, she responds:

"Ἡχώ: Ἡχώ λόγων ἀντῳδὸς ἐπικοκκάστρια, ἔπερ πέρνων ἐν τῷδε ταύτῳ χωρίῳ"

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113 Sommerstein (1994) *ad* 1020-1.
114 Segal (1970) 94, in his review of Rau (1967), claims that the Echo scene was such a distinctive feature of the Andromeda that it would have been more surprising if Aristophanes had not parodied it.
115 For ease and convenience, in this chapter I will simply refer to Echo as ‘Echo’ and in the feminine as ‘her’, even though I think it highly likely that Echo would in fact have been played by Euripides, *contra* Sommerstein (1994) *ad* 1056-97. For arguments that Euripides would have played Echo, see Rau (1967) 79-80, Zeitlin (1981) 316, Austin and Olson (2004) *ad* 1056-7.
Echo: I am Echo, the mocking mimic of words. A year ago, I aided Euripides in the dramatic contest in this very place. O child, you must do your part and lament piteously.
Mnesilochus: And you will lament back at me?
Echo: That will be my job. Now begin.

Echo’s self-description is itself remarkable, since she identifies herself to Mnesilochus not in relation to her role as a character within the Andromeda itself but in relation to Euripides, the tragedian. ταύτῳ χωρίῳ, ‘this very place’ (1060), must refer to the Theater of Dionysus itself, the location in which the Thesmophoriazusae is being performed and where the Andromeda was performed the year before. It can hardly refer to the Pnyx, the characters’ location internal to the comedy, and it does not seem to refer to Ethiopia, the imagined landscape of the Andromeda.

Echo’s declaration that she ‘competed alongside Euripides’ (Εὐριπίδη... ξυνηγωνιζόμην, 1061) places her in the metatheatrical space of almost a co-author. Echo’s reference to the fact that tragedy and comedy are performed in the same physical space is both fascinating and apparently unprecedented.

Although Echo commands Mnesilochus to lament his situation (1063-4), she does not clarify how mimicking those laments will aid in helping him escape, and her function in Euripides’ plan becomes no clearer as the scene wears on. Eventually she stops mimicking Mnesilochus and begins to mock the Scythian Archer, which annoys him enough that he begins

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117 If Echo played no functional role in the Andromeda, her uselessness here might in fact be part of the joke: Aristophanes mocks Euripides not only by importing the character, but also by using her in the same manner.
to chase her back and forth across the stage (1091-7). Undoubtedly amusing though this spectacle would have been to witness, it does nothing to advance the plot. Echo’s role in the Andromeda parody seems to accomplish little more than to show that too-close imitation can be extremely annoying to the person being imitated. Although Mnesilochus knows that Echo intends to help him, he finds her too irritating to bear. It is difficult not to see an amusing parallel here with Euripides and Aristophanes, where the Thesmophoriazusae is ‘echoing’ Euripides’ works through parody.118

At line 1098, Euripides finally arrives onstage dressed as Perseus.119 The scene shares several features with the parallel scene earlier in which he pretended to be Menelaus in order to trick Critylla. Just as Critylla asks if Mnesilochus has not yet been punished sufficiently for his γυναῖκισι (862-3) when he pretends to be Helen, the Archer is equally confused when Euripides insists that the captive is a woman. The Archer crudely gestures to the size of Mnesilochus’ phallus as proof of his maleness (1114). Both jailers are confused by Euripides’ and Mnesilochus’ use of tragic names, assuming that they have merely misspoken the names of contemporary Athenians: Critylla mishears ‘Proteus’, insisting that Proteas is dead (882-4), and the archer thinks that Euripides is claiming to be carrying the head of the scribe Gorgos instead of the Gorgon (1101-4).

There are, however, a few major differences in how the two parodies play out. In the Helen parody, as I described above, the characters quickly establish a pattern whereby

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118 Zeitlin (1981) 316-7 argues that Echo “mixes the tragic with the comic. Echo, in fact, might stand as the mediating figure between tragedy and comedy; she is divided between them and yet brings the genres together, as the artful device of the original and as the slapstick cliché of the comic theater.”

119 Since his appearance as Perseus was first foreshadowed at line 1011, quite a significant interlude has passed. The manner of his entrance, particularly as it concerned the méchanê, is still in dispute; Rau (1967) 67 thinks not, while most believe that the méchanê was used.
Euripides/Menelaus asks a question, Mnesilochus responds in character as Helen, and Critylla irritably corrects him with a response more appropriate to their surroundings. In this third part of the *Andromeda* parody, however, Mnesilochus is barely involved at all, aside from a brief plea to the ‘stranger’ to release ‘her’ from ‘her’ bonds (ὦ ξένε κατοίκτιρόν με τῆν παναθλίαν· / λύσόν με δεσμῶν, 1107-8). The rest of the interaction occurs between Euripides and the Scythian. Unlike in the *Helen* parody, where Euripides pretended not to know where he was or what was happening, now he is the one trying to convince the Scythian that Mnesilochus, who has by now long ago been revealed to be a man in a dress, is in fact Andromeda, the maiden daughter of Cepheus (1113). In the original, Perseus would have had to be informed of the identity of the maiden, but here Euripides is adapting the text freely to fit his purposes. He also repeatedly refers to the Archer as ‘Scythian’ (ὦ Σκύθα, 1112; φέρε Σκύθ’, 1116; ὃ Σκύθα, 1121), making no attempt to draw him into the parody as he did with Critylla by pretending she was Theonoe.

These allowances for the Archer’s lack of comprehension, however, are insufficient, and finally Euripides decides that the threat of violence is too great and leaves. While leaving, he makes this brief declaration:

> αἰαί· τί δράσω; πρὸς τίνας στρεφθῶ λόγους; 
> ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἄν ἐνδέξασθαι βάρβαρος φύσις. 
> σκαίοισι γάρ τοι κακὰ προσφέρον σοφά 
> μάτην ἀναλίσκοις ἄν, ἀλλὰ ἄλλην των 
> τοῦτω πρέπουσαν μηχανήν προσοιστέον. 

*(Thesmo. 1128-32)*

Alas, what am I to do? To what words shall I turn? But no – his barbarian nature would not comprehend them. ‘In vain would you bring original and clever plans to bear upon the foolish’ – some other device more suited to him must be used.

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120 Austin and Olson (2004) *ad loc.* argue that this is likely to be paratragedy rather than an actual fragment of the *Andromeda*. 

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In order to make his point, Euripides quotes from one of his own works, the *Medea*, originally performed in 431.\textsuperscript{121} It is ironic that Euripides would quote from tragedy, in a paratragic register, while discussing the need to suit his schemes to a less sophisticated audience that has thus far failed to appreciate or comprehend any material appropriated from tragedy.\textsuperscript{122} Although he recognizes the need to appeal to the least intelligent and savvy audience possible, he frames his decision to do so in highly tragic terms.\textsuperscript{123} The fact that Euripides is intentionally combining his tragic sensibility with content suited to his audience is crucially important for understanding how the ending of the *Thesmophoriazusae* fits into the relationship between tragedy and comedy throughout the play. Euripides is not rejecting tragedy in this moment, but instead recognizing its need, and his own need, to adapt to fit the present situation and perhaps even fuse with comedy.

Euripides’ exit marks the end of the last major parodic sequence of the *Thesmophoriazusae*. From this point, there is no obvious playacting or reference to any of his tragedies. The parodies have been unsuccessful in their stated aim, since Euripides has not yet managed to free Mnesilochus from his captivity. In the *Helen* and *Andromeda* parodies

\textsuperscript{121} Although it seems unlikely that many audience members would have recognized this context-free maxim from a play performed twenty years earlier, it does seem interesting that Medea makes her appearance in the *Thesmophoriazusae* here and not earlier, as an example of an evil woman. Torrance (2013) 292-3 notes that the word *kainos* is used more in the *Medea* than in any other Euripidean tragedy and that it is especially used throughout the play where Euripides’ treatment of the Medea myth diverges in a novel direction.

\textsuperscript{122} A concern to which Aristophanes himself was particularly sensitive; see, for instance, the revised parabasis at *Clouds* 520-7, in which he blames his defeat to Cratinus’ *Pytínē* on his attempt to appeal ‘to the clever viewers on whose behalf he labored’ (*τοῖς σοφοῖς, ὧν οὖνεκ’ ἐγὼ ταῦτ’ ἐπραγματευόμην*, 521). The clear suggestion is that he might have achieved more success had he aimed to appeal to a less intelligent majority of his audience.

\textsuperscript{123} Although I hesitate to rely on any biographical interpretations, one might see a subtly reference here to Euripides’ relatively few first-place prizes, implying something of a lack of success in appealing to his Athenian audience. Aristophanes may be suggesting that in recent years Euripides has taken to pandering to his audience’s tastes.
particularly, Euripides and Mnesilochus have been unsuccessful in drawing their internal audiences into the world of tragic parody. No matter how hard Euripides tries, both Critylla and the Scythian Archer remain stubbornly convinced that they are in fifth-century Athens, not some far-off place long ago, and that Mnesilochus is a man, not a woman. Euripides and Mnesilochus are not as successful as Agathon at creating, if not the illusion of femininity, then at least the confusion of androgyny. Up to this point, mimesis of both gender and genre has proven ineffective.

From a different perspective, however, Mnesilochus has gradually become feminized over the course of the play.124 When he first infiltrated the Thesmophoria, his female costume was merely a disguise, functioning similarly to Telephus’ beggar costume: it masked his true identity and allowed him to infiltrate the festival without being immediately recognized as an impostor. The dress that Mnesilochus wears, however, becomes more indicative of his role as the play continues. First, when he is searching for a trick to escape, he decides to play Euripides’ Helen partially out of convenience, since he is wearing a dress already, saying, ἐγὼ δα: τὴν καινὴν Ἑλένην μιμήσομαι. / πάνως ἐὰν υπάρχει μοι γυναικεία στολή (I know! I’ll imitate Euripides’ recent Helen. I’ve already got the female costume; 850-1). Mnesilochus seems to understand finally the point that Agathon was trying to make in the first scene of the play: by wearing the costume of a tragic heroine, it becomes easier to imitate one. After his lack of success in playing Helen, however, when the Magistrate arrives and the male justice apparatus of the city is beginning to take over from the female justice of the Thesmophoria, Mnesilochus asks to be treated like a man and allowed to remove his dress and be bound to the plank naked (939-42).

124 For a contrary view that emphasizes the masculinity of Mnesilochus, see Whitman (1964) 224, McClure (1999) 235-6.
The Magistrate refuses, saying that the Boulê has decreed that his crime should be evident to all, and Mnesilochus bemoans that his dress has ruined him (943-5). His costume has gone from being a disguise, to a convenient tool, to something that he is not allowed to remove.

Additionally, throughout the play he shows decreasing agency, taking a progressively less active role in his own rescue and eventually being cast by the Scythian and Euripides-as-Perseus in the role of a passive object of male desire. When Euripides finally unties Mnesilochus, he tells him, “And you, as soon as you’re free, be a man and flee home as quickly as you can to your wife and children” (σὺ δ’ ὅπως ἀνδρικῶς / ὅταν λυθῇς τάχιστα φεύξει καὶ τενεῖς / ὡς τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ παιδί’ οἴκαδε, 1204-6). The use of the word ἀνδρικῶς here is ironic, even if Euripides does not intend it as such, in light of the fact that both men would have been wearing dresses at this point. Although Mnesilochus is never completely feminized, and he fails completely at convincing the internal audiences of Critylla and the Scythian Archer of his femininity, his masculinity is increasingly challenged as the play continues. His mimesis of female characters is not externally convincing, but it is transformative. And just as Mnesilochus’ repeated imitations of female characters have had the unintended effect of leading to his feminization, the repeated tragic parodies within the Thesmophoriazusae have caused the play as a whole to resemble a failed Euripidean escape-tragedy.

In the last major sequence of the play, Euripides arrives onstage, dressed for the first time

\(^{125}\) The Archer repeatedly mistakes Euripides-as-Perseus’ professions of ‘love’ for Mnesilochus-as-Andromeda as desire to bugger him and unhelpfully suggests that Euripides drill a hole in the plank in which Mnesilochus is bound (1118-20, 1123-4). Mnesilochus has been reduced, sexually, to the same passivity which he was so willing to inflict on Agathon at 157-8.

\(^{126}\) Gamel (2002a) 324.
in a female costume.\textsuperscript{127} He makes an agreement with the women, in his own persona, that if they release Mnesilochus to him they will have nothing to complain about from his plays in the future (1160–3). The women agree to Euripides’ proposition, but tell him that he will need to figure out how to get by the Scythian Archer on his own (1170–1). Euripides is already prepared with a new stratagem, and after the failed Andromeda parody, he has learned to fit his scheme to his audience. He convinces the Archer that he is a madam named ‘Artemisia’ and brings with him onstage a male flute player named ‘Teredon’ (Wormwood) and a dancing-girl named ‘Elaphion’ (Fawn).\textsuperscript{128} Elaphion dances while Teredon plays, and the Archer is so tantalized by the dancing that he begs Euripides to let him sleep with her, offering his quiver as collateral for payment (1195–1200). Elaphion and the Archer exit offstage, Euripides unbinds Mnesilochus, and both men run off (1202–9). The Archer returns, but his satisfaction after his encounter with Elaphion is quickly soured when he realizes that both his quiver and the man whom he is supposed to be watching have disappeared (1210–7). The chorus purposely misleads him about the direction that Euripides and Mnesilochus have run off in, and the Archer runs back and forth across the stage for a second time (1220–5), just as he had done earlier with Echo. The chorus then announces that everything has turned out well, and the play ends.

Most scholars have seen this ending as a rejection of tragic parody in favor of traditional

\textsuperscript{127} Sommerstein (1994) \textit{ad} 1160 points out the confusion here, since the women recognize Euripides right away but the Scythian does not. The easiest way to reconcile this, according to him, is to assume that Euripides is already in a dress but has not yet put on his veil. Later in the scene, he wears both to trick the Archer. Austin and Olson (2004) have a slightly different interpretation, where Euripides is dressed like himself at first and then quickly throws on a woman’s \textit{himation} and mask.

\textsuperscript{128} Sommerstein (1994) and Austin and Olson (2004) both point out that Elaphion was a common prostitute name, although I suspect along with Bobrick (1991) that something more interesting is at work with this specific choice; see below, p. 260. Zeitlin (1981) 317 argues that the name ‘Artemisia’ is chosen because of the famous quote in Herodotus about how she was more of a man than the male Persian generals, which would support the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}’s general ‘woman on top’ theme.
comic tropes. In this line of argument, Euripides has decided that he will not be able to rescue Mnesilochus by using a stratagem from one of his tragedies, so he instead borrows from comedy one of its most characteristic figures, the dancing-girl. Others point out that the entire sequence with Elaphion is not dramatically necessary: the Scythian Archer is already asleep when Euripides comes onstage to make his deal with the women, so perhaps he could have just untied Mnesilochus then. Elaphion’s purpose would be, therefore, not functional but symbolic, to allow the play to end with a reaffirmation of traditional sexual roles. The gender confusion that throughout the play has accompanied the use of tragedy is rejected in favor of a traditional comic ending and a reaffirmation of straightforward masculinity.

Scholars who follow this line of argument, however, fail to notice that the entire second half of the Thesmophoriazusae broadly resembles a Euripidean escape-tragedy in both structure and content, and Euripides’ use of Elaphion does in fact fit into that framework, although in a slightly surprising manner. Both within the Helen and Andromeda parodies and in the Thesmophoriazusae itself, a ‘damsel’ who is in serious danger of violence colludes with a hero to escape from at least one ‘barbarian’ blocking figure. In the endings of Euripides’ escape-tragedies, a complicated plan is then enacted, in which a false ritual is created to convince the blocking figure to unwittingly aid in the hero and heroine’s escape. In the Helen, Helen convinces

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130 Gelzer (1993) 84. Austin and Olson (2004) argue that this would have made an extremely unsatisfying ending to the play, and instead see the ending with the dancing-girl as a kind of satyr-play that rounds out the Euripidean tetralogy here (see also their introduction lxiii-iv). I prefer their interpretation to that of Sommerstein (1994), who sees it as “Euripides succeeding with a low comic ploy after failing with a series of elevated tragic ploys.”
Theoclymenus to lend her a ship so she can stage a burial for Menelaus at sea. When he agrees, she and Menelaus kill the Egyptians who are sent to aid in the fake ritual and sail back to Greece. This trick is particularly well-suited to Theoclymenus because, as is mentioned earlier in the play, no matter what his treatment of Helen has been, he is well-known for his piety (*Helen* 9-10).131 Similarly, in the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, Iphigeneia convinces Thoas that the statue of Artemis has become impure through contact with Orestes and that it must now be cleansed. Thoas, she contends, must be blindfolded so that he does not see the profane ritual (*IT* 1153-1233). Naturally, she, Orestes, and Pylades use this opportunity to escape.132

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Euripides’ trick functions in a similar manner. Instead of inventing the need for a religious ritual in order to appeal to a pious barbarian, Euripides brings in Eastern music and a dancing-girl to appeal to the Archer’s foreignness and appetite for sex. In both cases, the Greeks play on the weaknesses of the barbarians to fool them. Additionally, as Elizabeth Bobrick has argued, Euripides’ naming choices in this interlude are highly significant. By calling himself ‘Artemisia’ and the dancing-girl ‘Elaphion’, he subtly suggests that Mnesilochus is Iphigeneia, and he is replacing her with a deer.133 Because he has learned his lesson from the failure of the *Andromeda* parody, he does not try to convince the Archer that they are on Aulis or that the dancing-girl truly is a deer. Instead, he attempts a different and more successful kind of adaptation of tragedy.

131 Although Burnett (1960) 157 mocks Grube for being too credulous about Theoclymenus’ alleged piety. See also Meltzer (1994) 240 on the appropriateness, or lack thereof, of Theoclymenus’ and Theonoe’s names.  
132 The ending of the *Andromeda*, unfortunately, is unknown. Possibly, after Perseus’ rescue of Andromeda, her father Cepheus wished to renege on his promise that the two would then be married, and either a debate or an escape became necessary. See Collard and Cropp (2008) 126-7.  
133 Bobrick (1991). Bobrick points out (p. 69) that her interpretation is not mutually exclusive with Zeitlin’s interpretation of the name Artemisia.
This ending is certainly not a complete rejection of tragedy in favor of comedy, but instead a marriage of comic tropes and tragic structures that serves as the perfect ending to a comedy dedicated to tragic parody. Aristophanes was mocked by his competitors for spending so much energy parodying Euripides, and his response was similar to Euripides’ responses to Aristophanes’ own running gags: he self-consciously embraces the trope as a characteristic feature of his style. Throughout the two playwrights’ intertextual dialogue, Aristophanes appropriates from Euripides to enrich his comedies; the subordinating incorporation of Euripidean tragedy into the *Thesmophoriazusae* reflects this tendency.

IV. **“The god who is both cruelest and kindest to men” (Bacchae 861)**

Just as the *Thesmophoriazusae* devotes a great deal of energy to appropriating from and parodying Euripidean tragedy, the *Bacchae* draws many of its themes and motifs from Aristophanic comedy. The extensive appropriation of Euripidean content has a fundamental impact on the structure of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, which has an ending that combines elements of traditional comic endings and the endings of Euripidean escape-tragedies. In the *Bacchae*, a similar fusion occurs: Euripides combines comic and tragic elements in a play that borrows from Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*. The result is a play that, while taking an ostensibly very traditional tragic form, seems sometimes to be more of a mixture of the two genres. The *Bacchae* is a further variation on the theme of generic and authorial hybridity in the *Thesmophoriazusae*.

Some scholars argue that in the prologue of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus presents the situation in such a way as to allow for the possibility of either a comic or a tragic outcome. In this interpretation, Dionysus’ only motivation is to bring his rites to Thebes, and if Pentheus had reacted in a more moderate way, then the Dionysiac mysteries could have been integrated into
the city without needing recourse to violence. Immediately after sending Pentheus away to be
costumed as a woman, the Stranger announces that the king will be forced to acknowledge
Dionysus, “the kindest and the cruelest god to men” (δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποις δ᾽ ἥπιωτατος, 861). Had Pentheus been more reasonable, the ending would then have been a positive
celebration of Dionysus’ gentler side. Unfortunately, Pentheus is not receptive to the god, and
the ending is not a festive celebration of the joys of Dionysus, but instead a slaughter.

On the other hand, slaughter and Dionysiac festivities are not always mutually exclusive.
When viewed from the perspective of the god and the chorus, the ending of the Bacchae does
indeed seem like a traditional Dionysiac celebration. The messenger is shocked and upset by the
chorus’ joyful response to Pentheus’ demise (1030-40). As I mentioned above, Pentheus is
implicitly compared to a sacrificial animal, and the Stranger’s treatment of him explicitly follows
the ritual pattern of pompē-agōn-kōmos that characterizes festivals, including perhaps the Great
Dionysia itself: he plays escort (pompos) to Pentheus in order to lead him to his contest (agōn) on
Cithaeron (964-5), and after the death of Pentheus, the chorus and Agave rejoice in a kōmos
similar to the endings of many comedies. In fact, from a certain angle, the ending of the
Bacchae appears similar to the celebration of Dionysus that comes at the conclusion of
Aristophanes’ Acharnians. The suffering of Cadmus and Agave does not alter the comic pattern
of the Dionysiac celebration, just as Lamachus’ suffering in the Acharnians did not turn that
comic celebration into a tragic one. In the Bacchae, as Foley has argued, Dionysus also makes

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134 See especially Burnett (1970) 18-9. Burnett argues that the plot of the Bacchae most resembles the kind
of folk-tale in which a god wanders around in disguise as a beggar and punishes or rewards people based
on whether they provide him with hospitality. Foley (1980) 119-20 supports Burnett’s claim that Dionysus
is initially ambivalent: “As in comedy the god offers to Thebes the possibility of temporary regeneration
through a reversal of normal social and political categories.”

extensive use of theatrical tools such as costuming and spectacle in order to lead Pentheus to his downfall;\textsuperscript{136} he creates a ‘comedy’ within the tragedy for which he is the sole spectator.\textsuperscript{137}

Significantly, the parts of the \textit{Bacchae} that most resemble a comedy structurally are some of the scenes that are least likely to cause the audience to laugh, just as the scenes of tragic parody in the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} are extremely funny and not at all tragic or sad.\textsuperscript{138} In fact, the celebratory jubilance of the chorus at the end of the \textit{Bacchae} serves as a foil that emphasizes, and perhaps even magnifies, the pain and suffering felt by Cadmus and Agave. This effect might have been even more obvious if the text of the ending of the \textit{Bacchae} were more complete; did the chorus continue to rejoice as Pentheus’ mother and grandfather rearranged and mourned over his fragmented body?\textsuperscript{139} Seidensticker argues that comic moments in tragedy, such as the Dionysiac costumes of Cadmus and Teiresias, magnify the tragic tone by contrast.\textsuperscript{140} Although not all would agree with his assessment of the humor of Cadmus and Teiresias, Seidensticker’s claim is admirably illustrated at the end of the play, when the audience experiences at the conclusion of a tragedy the jarring effect of seeing the chorus celebrating the end of a comedy.

\textsuperscript{136} Foley (1980) 113: “It is with theatrical weapons, also, that Dionysus destroys Pentheus. He entraps the king in a series of spectacles directed by himself. Twice, both in the stable scene, which the god reports as a kind of ‘messenger’, and in the final disaster on the mountain, Dionysus calmly sets the scene – in the second case replete with costume, actors, and set – and then stands back or disappears into a position of heavenly observation, an unmoved spectator of human struggle.”

\textsuperscript{137} Pentheus’ inability to understand that he is the spectacle and not the spectator plays a significant role in his destruction; see J. Barrett (1998).

\textsuperscript{138} March (1989) 60 claims that “Of all the scenes in Greek Tragedy, therefore, those between Pentheus and Dionysos after the god has taken possession of the young king must surely be two of those most productive of pity and fear.”

\textsuperscript{139} The end of the \textit{Bacchae} is famously lacunose. However, from a combination of sources including the hypothesis of the play and the adaptation in the \textit{Christus Patiens}, it seems likely that the gap contained a scene in which Agave reassembled Pentheus’ body, embracing and lamenting each fragment. Dionysus then appeared on the \textit{theolegeion}, declared the justice of Pentheus’ death, and announced that Agave and her sisters would have to leave the city, since they were now polluted by kin murder. Our surviving text continues with the god’s prediction of the fate of Cadmus. See Dodds (1960) \textit{ad} 1329, Seaforth (1981) 252.

\textsuperscript{140} Seidensticker (1978).
The ending of the *Bacchae* is, the response of the chorus notwithstanding, a tragic ending *par excellence*.\(^{141}\) It inspires pity and fear, as Aristotle would have wanted. Although the audience may have initially sympathized with the god and understood his anger at Pentheus and the Thebans, by the end he seems remote and alien, demanding a revenge which Cadmus claims is excessive (1346).\(^{142}\) Pentheus becomes increasingly sympathetic, especially when Cadmus tells a story about him as a young child:

> ὦ φίλτατ’ ἀνδρῶν – καὶ γὰρ οὐκέτ’ ὃν ὅμως
> τῶν φιλτάτων ἐμοι’ ἀμυθήσῃ, τέκνον –
> οὐκέτι γενείου τοῦδε ἔργων χερί,
> τὸν μητρὸς αὐδῶν πατέρα προσπτύξῃ, τέκνον,
> λέγων: Τίς ἀδικεῖ, τίς σ’ ἀτιμάζει, γέρον;
> τίς σὴν παράσσει καρδίαν λυπηρὸς ὤν;
> λέγ’, ὡς κολάζω τὸν ἄδικοντά σ’, ὦ πάτερ.
> νῦν δ’ ἀθλοῦς μὲν εἰμ’ ἐγώ, τλήμων δὲ σύ. 1320

*(Bacchae 1316-23)*

O dearest of men – for though you are no longer alive, you will still be counted dearest to me, child – no longer will you embrace me, grabbing my beard in your hand, calling me ‘Grandfather’, saying, “Who wrongs you, old man, who dishonors you? What troublesome man disturbs your heart? Tell me so that I can punish the man who wrongs you, Grandfather.” But now I am wretched, and you are miserable.

The young Pentheus in this story bears obvious similarities to the character from the play, obsessed with his family’s honor and with punishing those who would compromise their status. But with this anecdote, the same characteristics that had earlier made Pentheus act in a manner deserving of punishment also become endearing. The king who had previously seemed arrogant,

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\(^{141}\) Perris (2011) 38 claims that “If *Bacchae* exemplifies Greek tragedy, it does so not only through ritual or metatheatre, but also through the tragic processes of violence and death.”

\(^{142}\) The ambivalence felt in the play about the justice of Dionysus has led some to ask what Dodds (1960) xlv calls the “flat-footed question” of whether or not Euripides “approved” of Dionysus; for an even-handed discussion, see Segal (1997) 19-21.
shortsighted, and tyrannical is suddenly felt to be a very young man attempting to maintain
control over his city.¹⁴³ Through the grief of Cadmus, we experience fully the pathos of Pentheus’
demise at the hands of his own mother.

In this fusion of comic and tragic structure, the *Bacchae* once more comes to resemble the
*Thesmophoriazusae*. Just as the *Thesmophoriazusae* sets tragic parody scenes within a comic
frame, the *Bacchae* sets a Dionysiac comic celebration within a tragic frame. The ending of the
*Thesmophoriazusae* contains the characteristic elements of a Euripidean escape-tragedy, but they
are acted out by comic characters, a dancing girl and a sexually frustrated Scythian Archer,
creating an ending so funny and so traditionally comic-seeming that many scholars have
embraced the idea that Aristophanes is creating a contest in which comedy ‘defeats’ tragedy.¹⁴⁴
Similarly, the *Bacchae* ends in a spirit of comic festivity for the chorus and the god, but their
celebration only heightens the tragic laments of Cadmus and Agave.

The incorporation of comic elements into a tragedy is not unique to the *Bacchae*; as I have

¹⁴³ On the youth of Pentheus, see Arrowsmith (1959) 147: “Yet as [Pentheus] makes his entrance, breathing
fury against the Maenads, I think we are meant to be struck by his extreme youth. Just how old he is,
Euripides does not tell us; but since he is presented as still a beardless boy at the time of his death (see ll.
1185ff.), he cannot very well be much more than sixteen or seventeen. And this youth seems to me
dramatically important, helping to qualify Pentheus’ prurient sexual imagination (for the voyeurism
which in a grown man would be overtly pathological is at most an obsessive and morbid curiosity in a
boy) and later serving to enlist our sympathies sharply on the side of the boy-victim of a ruthless god.”
Dodds (1960) *ad* 974 argues that our sympathies first start to shift when the Stranger refers to Pentheus as
a *νεανίας*, although March (1989) 44 is dismissive of this analysis: “this is very much the reaction of a man
reading the play quietly in his study... Pentheus is instead this very young king, very much aware of his
responsibilities, who takes his duties as a ruler very seriously.” Regardless of whether Pentheus’ youth is
felt poignantly throughout the play, or at the moment when his fate is decided, or even only at the end
through Cadmus’ mourning reminiscence, it remains a key element in securing the sympathy of the
audience in spite of his *hybris*.

¹⁴⁴ Zeitlin (1981) 303 claims, “In this brilliant and ingenious play, the contest between the genders must
share the spotlight with the contest between the genres, tragedy and comedy.” Both of these ‘contests’, as
Zeitlin herself notes, are in fact illusory ones, with preordained victors. In a comedy written by a man,
men will always defeat women and comedy will always defeat tragedy, simply by virtue of being allowed to
set the rules of the contest.
argued, other Euripidean plays, such as the Helen, also contain comic elements. But the resulting play has a strange, almost metatheatrical tone that has unsettled scholars and led them to consider the play a ‘tragicomedy’. When Mnesilochus says that he will act out a scene from ἡ καινὴ Ἑλένη (Thesmo. 850), it is difficult to resist the implication that Euripides’ Helen is καινὴ not only because it was performed just a year earlier, but also because of the unprecedented representation of its sôphrôn heroine and the unusual structure of its plot. Much of what makes the Helen odd, I have argued, stems from its position in Euripides’ dialogue with Aristophanes. Although the Bacchae owes as much to comedy as the Helen does, if not more, it has remained relatively unafflicted by questions of genre. Even scholars who emphasize the role of comic elements in the play claim that the comedy serves not to undercut the tragic frame but to emphasize it, creating an unsettling effect that makes the catastrophic events of the play even more horrifying. The Bacchae has even been called “the most tragic of plays.” Euripides has incorporated comedy extensively into tragedy without creating a product that resembles tragicomedy.

The Bacchae is so tragic, so traditional-seeming, that some scholars have considered it to be Euripides’ palinode. In this interpretation, after a career of promoting atheism – a charge

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145 Chapter 2, pp. 82-4.
146 Austin and Olson (2004) ad loc.
147 Seidensticker (1982), followed reluctantly by Taplin (1986) 165, who claims that in the rare case where there are comic elements in tragedy, they “are there as often as not in order to accentuate tragic tone elsewhere in the play.” More recently, Wallace (2013) comes to a similar conclusion.
148 Sansone (1987) 46. Interestingly, Sansone’s argument is a response to Burnett (1971) that certain of Euripides’ late plays contain ‘satyric’ elements. Sansone notes that no fewer than 23 of Burnett’s 28 satyric elements may be found in the Bacchae, concluding, “Either, therefore, the Bacchae, this most tragic of plays, has been consistently and grossly misunderstood, or the practice of discovering satyr-play elements in the ‘non-tragic’ tragedies of Euripides should be replaced with a more fruitful one.”
149 Dodds (1960) xl-xlvi traces the history of the palinode theory; Henrichs (1986) 391-6 is an admirable study of Nietzsche’s half-hearted adoption of the palinode theory, which he argues went out of fashion after Tyrell’s 1871 edition of the Bacchae. See also Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990) 383-4.
leveled at Euripides by the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* – Euripides has finally rejected the teachings of Socrates and embraced the overwhelming, undeniable power of the Olympian gods. This interpretation fails for many reasons, and it has been many years since it was the consensus view. But despite its failings, the palinode interpretation relies on the unexpected but also undeniable fact that the *Bacchae*, with its traditionalist plot, structure, and style, does appear to reject much of what characterizes Euripides' late plays, such as exotic settings, complicated and unpredictable plots, musical experimentation, and the increasing marginalization of the chorus. In the *Bacchae*, the chorus is fully and directly engaged in the action,150 in contrast with other late Euripidean plays in which the chorus functions primarily as detached observers. The *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, which was performed the same year as the *Bacchae*, contains elements of the New Music, while the *Bacchae* contains highly traditional dithyramb.151 The language of the play also contains more archaisms and fewer colloquialisms than other Euripidean plays.152 Finally, the plot of the *Bacchae*, which follows the difficult and painful route by which the city of Thebes comes to recognize the power and divinity of the god Dionysus, is perhaps the most traditional, even prototypical plot in all of Greek tragedy. The *Bacchae* feels like a play in which Euripides is going back not only to earlier in his own career, but perhaps even further, to the beginnings of his genre.153

If the *Helen* incorporated comedy into a tragedy with a surprising and unusual plot, the

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150 Winnington-Ingram (1948) 2 notes how unusual the use of the chorus in this play is: “In no other extant Greek play since Aeschylus, and in Aeschylus only in the *Suppliants* and *Eumenides*, is the Chorus so prominent.”

151 The *parodos* is a very traditional dithyramb; see Chapter 3, p. 182, n. 98.

152 See Dodds (1960) xxxvii with nn. 3-6; Dodds notes that the *Bacchae* also contains a great deal of Aeschylean language, likely more than we can know without the survival of the *Lycurgesia*.

Bacchae does the opposite. Despite containing many comic elements, its plot is highly traditional. Many other tragedians also wrote plays dramatizing myths about Dionysus bringing his rites to unwilling cities; Aeschylus’ Lycurgeia may have been a classic example when Aristophanes wrote the Thesmophoriazusae, but there were other, more recent versions as well. It is not difficult to understand why this kind of plot was attractive to tragedians: since Dionysus was the god of theater, stories about him are an exceptionally fertile ground for exploration of metatheatrical issues, allowing the tragedian to stage a metaphorical version of the birth of tragedy itself. Zeitlin argues that the very traditionalism of the Dionysiac plot makes it the perfect subject for a sophisticated, self-aware play written by a tragedian at the end of his career:

History has cunningly arranged it that Euripides’ last play, the Bacchae, should also refer back to the archaic scenario that underlies the ritual conditions of the theater. Yet viewed in its metatheatrical aspects, the Bacchae also makes claims to be considered in a diachronic perspective as a belated exemplar of the genre that by now has developed a keen awareness of its own properties and conventions.

The Bacchae is an innovative play that also recalls the very beginnings of tragedy. But Dionysus is the god of both tragedy and comedy, and the metatheatrical tools that Dionysus uses in the Bacchae to facilitate Pentheus’ destruction are the elements that tragedy and comedy share in

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154 Dodds (1960) xxviii–xxxiii is an excellent summary of earlier Dionysiac plays. The greatest losses in terms of value for study of the Bacchae are likely Aeschylus’ Theban Dionysiac trilogy and Xenocles’ Bacchae, which won first place in 415. March (1989) 37 suggests, purely speculatively, that Xenocles’ version influenced late fifth-century and fourth-century pots that depict an armed Pentheus fighting the Bacchants.

155 Damen and Richards (2012) 363: “Euripides has provided an etiology of sorts for drama itself or, more precisely, the ingredients that constitute drama – audience, impersonation, costume, wig, props, and the dramatic illusion – by showing the moment when Dionysus first combined them into a sort of proto-drama, not a fully formed play as yet, only a rough draft of the art form which would many centuries later fall under this god’s purview.”

156 Zeitlin (1990) 364.
common, such as costume and spectacle. Oliver Taplin argues that the strict boundary that divided tragedy from comedy developed as time went on, creating a relatively rigid set of rules that was adhered to most closely between 440 and 415. Before this period, the rules were not yet in place, and it was not problematic for Orestes in the *Choephoroe* to knock on the door of the palace, even though door-knocking would later become a strictly comic trope. After the rules became codified, tragedians such as Euripides began to bend and break them. The *Bacchae* seems to fit into both of these categories: it is a sophisticated late play that, by extensively incorporating comic elements, also recalls an earlier period in the history of tragedy before the theatrical conventions of tragedy and comedy solidified. That Euripides resynthesized the two genres together in the context of a play about Dionysus, the god of theater, is even more striking.

Throughout the *Bacchae*, the characters seem to struggle to answer the question of what is the best way to celebrate Dionysus. The Asian maenads of the chorus claim that celebration of Dionysus should be done through communing with nature and ecstatic ritual. Teiresias suggests a more rationalistic approach of worshipping the god and appreciating the importance of wine and Dionysiac madness in all areas of life. Cadmus utilizes a civic model for incorporating Dionysus into the city. The Stranger is purposely, almost enragingly enigmatic, but he does seem to display a preference for celebrating the god through his mysteries. None of these answers is

159 On Old Comedy and the *Oresteia* more generally, see Herington (1965) 395-7.
160 Foley (2008), especially p. 16.
161 Dunn (2010) 11, with original emphasis: “The central aim of this drama is not so much to tell a story about Dionysus as simply to enact who and what he is.” On Dionysiac religion and the *Bacchae*, see also Winnington-Ingram (1948) 6-13.
entirely correct or incorrect; they are complementary, not inherently exclusive.\(^{162}\) In a suggestive parallel, scholars have used many different approaches to understanding and interpreting this play; there are as many ways to read the *Bacchae* as there are to celebrate the god. As Charles Segal argues, “A literary masterpiece like the *Bacchae* does not have one single definite meaning, but rather an endlessly shifting constellation of possibilities, multiple relations and interactions, fixities and indeterminacies that are constantly rearranging themselves with each reading and each reader.”\(^{163}\) Perhaps the most influential contemporary approach is the one most used by Segal, a structuralist reading of Dionysus as the god who embraces the (usually mutually exclusive) dichotomies that defined Greek thought. Dionysus is both Greek and foreign, male and female, human and beast and god, at home in both the city and in the wilderness. By encompassing these dichotomies, Dionysus emphasizes through contrast the fact that nobody else can; Pentheus is spectacularly unsuccessful in his own attempts.\(^{164}\)

More recently, Victoria Wohl has argued that the structuralist paradigm is insufficient to describe the approach of the *Bacchae* to the dichotomy of male and female. She rejects Segal's structuralist conclusion that the *Bacchae* tends to “reinforce rather than eliminate that sexual differentiation”\(^{165}\) and instead argues that the boundary between male and female throughout the play becomes increasingly problematic and permeable.\(^{166}\) Although Wohl argues in her 'Oedipal' reading of the *Bacchae* that Pentheus’ transvestism does not challenge his essential masculinity,

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\(^{162}\) As I argue in Chapter 3, p. 181 and nn. 95-6, Cadmus and Teiresias are not precisely incorrect. Their means of celebrating Dionysus are necessary but not sufficient.

\(^{163}\) Segal (1997) 5.

\(^{164}\) *ibid.* 10-12.

\(^{165}\) *ibid.* 213.

\(^{166}\) Wohl (2005). For her rebuttal of Segal, see especially pp. 137-8.
but rather serves to confirm the paradigm.\textsuperscript{167} In her subsequent, anti-Oedipal reading she notes, “[Pentheus’] transvestism is more on the order of an imitation for the purpose of dominating the other. But even for him there is a moment of disorientation, a vacillation between playing the other and becoming-other. As he fixes his hair and dress, Pentheus begins to act not only like a woman but as a woman.”\textsuperscript{168} Pentheus, according to Wohl, is the character in the play who is most stubbornly attached to an Oedipal mindset;\textsuperscript{169} nearly all of the other characters become-other throughout the play with far less resistance than he does.

As a play that contains comic elements within a highly traditional tragic plot, the \textit{Bacchae} becomes an unexpected hybrid of generic elements even as it contains characters who fuse and combine elements of both genders. What is more, these breakdowns of traditional gender categories and traditional genre categories are themselves inextricable, because the transvestism and androgyny of the characters in the \textit{Bacchae} imitates the similar spectrum of feminized males from the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}. The \textit{Bacchae} appropriates from the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} the most when its male characters adopt female attributes, linking transgressions of gender with transgressions of genre. As I have argued, these appropriations have consequences: men who adopt female clothing become feminized, and plays that borrow content from other genres begin to resemble generic hybrids. But both the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} and the \textit{Bacchae} do seem to insist, eventually, upon a degree of essentialism: Agathon, Mnesilochus, and Pentheus all remain male no matter how feminized they become,\textsuperscript{170} and the \textit{Thesmophoriazusae} remains very much a comedy and the \textit{Bacchae} very much a tragedy. Male and female do not, ultimately, fuse together

\textsuperscript{167} ibid. 142.
\textsuperscript{168} ibid. 146-7.
\textsuperscript{169} ibid. 146.
\textsuperscript{170} On a similar note, Bobrick (1997) 179 argues that male and female roles in the city also are shaken over the course of the play, but ultimately remain unchanged.
in this play, nor do tragedy and comedy. If there is a fusion that takes place, it is not on the gender or genre level, but rather on an authorial level: ultimately, it is more difficult to separate the Aristophanic and Euripidean elements than the male and female or tragic and comic.

Segal argues that, as a tragedy about the god of tragedy, the *Bacchae* may be seen as an especially characteristic representation of Euripides’ tragic brand:

> By choosing as his central figure a god whose very nature is the coexistence of contraries and the crossing of boundaries, Euripides provides a summation and distillation, of a sort, of his tragic art, while also fashioning a powerful representation of an essential quality of all tragedy, the polarization of what we call reality into mutually contradictory extremes that are also coexistent with each other. Self-clarification blends with self-destruction.\(^{171}\)

This insight is applicable even more widely than Segal intends. As I have argued in this chapter, the boundary that separates self-clarification and self-destruction is remarkably thin in both the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Bacchae*. In both plays, natural opposites fuse: males adopt the clothing and characteristics of females, comedy both parodies and imitates tragedy, and tragedy appropriates from comedy. Ultimately, these fusions serve to confirm the original state: male characters remain essentially male, and nobody would claim that the *Thesmophoriazusae* is a tragedy or that the *Bacchae* is a comedy. However, although the initial status remains, imitation and parody are transformative.

Through its extensive appropriation of Euripidean tragedy, the *Thesmophoriazusae* as a whole becomes, like Agathon, a conglomeration of contradictory elements that defies any kind of easy classification into a simple generic contest. It is more comedy than tragedy, just as Agathon

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\(^{171}\) C. Segal (1997) 331.
is more male than female, but each has taken on enough superficial characteristics of its opposite to cause confusion. Like Mnesilochus, we are left sure only that what we see before us looks like Dionysus, which is to say, drama. The *Bacchae* in turn responds to and appropriates from the *Thesmophoriazusae* in a play that dramatizes the terrible and awesome power of the god of theater, developing a further variation on the comedy’s theme of gender and generic fusion and staging comic tropes within a prototypically tragic frame. The result is a combination of male and female, comedy and tragedy, paratragedy and paracomedy, and the Aristophanic and the Euripidean.
Aristophanes might be the most influential critic in the history of the study of Euripides’ tragedies; his only competition for the title is Aristotle. The impact of Aristophanes’ assessments of what traits were characteristically Euripidean can hardly be overstated, both in the ancient world and today. But Euripides also participated in the process of defining what it meant to be Euripidean by expanding on and exploiting Aristophanes’ mockery to create his unique tragic brand. To Aristophanes, being Euripidean meant writing about ragged heroes who manipulate the sympathies of the audience. It meant writing about the erotic parts of the female existence as a way to explore the spectrum of female virtue and vice. And later in the tragedian’s career, it meant fusing comic and tragic tropes. Aristophanes defined these tropes as Euripidean, but he also appropriated them for his own purposes, causing his own comic style to become more Euripidean in the process. As I have shown, Euripides then self-consciously reincorporated the features Aristophanes had mocked into his later works, building on Aristophanes’ variations on his own themes.

It is likely that closer exploration of Aristophanes’ other running gags about Euripidean idiosyncrasies would reveal even more themes on which the two playwrights responsively developed variations. Aristophanes’ mockery of Euripides’ allegedly bizarre religious views may have influenced the depiction of the divine in Euripides’ later works, including the Bacchae. Aristophanes’ parodies of Euripides’ lyrics could also have contributed to the formation of a
Euripidean lyric style. Additionally, the convergence of the Aristophanic and the Euripidean has potentially significant ramifications for the study of the development of New Comedy. Scholars debate whether Menander’s comedies seem more similar to the works of Euripides or Aristophanes, but my study suggests a possible middle ground between these two poles. In my third chapter, I argued that the Thesmophoriazusae borrows from Euripides his greater focus on the female experience; the domestic settings of New Comedy could derive from this combination of tragic and comic variations on the same theme.

In 1986, Oliver Taplin published his seminal article ‘Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A Synkrisis’, in which he argued that “to a considerable degree fifth-century tragedy and comedy help to define each other by their opposition and their reluctance to overlap.” Taplin claims that, while the two genres shared a common dramatic festival, performance space, and some theatrical conventions, these similarities formed the basis for a distinguishing polarity rather than convergence. Taplin’s argument has been highly influential, although it has been refined and qualified often in the past thirty years by scholars suggesting that the conventions of tragedy and comedy may not have been as rigidly separate as Taplin claimed. However, my study suggests a

1 See Chapter 2, p. 114, n. 75 for a possible example in the Helen.
2 Taplin (1986) 164. Taplin cites a relevant passage from Plato’s Symposium in which Socrates argues that the same man should be able to write both tragedies and comedies (Plato, Symposium 223c-d) and argues that Socrates’ claim would have seemed absurd to his contemporaries; see also Lowe (2008) 24: “...the point of the episode is that the idea is presented as a joke: the only person who would seriously pretend to argue such a notion is the fifth century’s most notorious intellectual provocateur, and on grounds which even Plato does not take seriously enough to feel them worth setting out at length.” In fact, Plato’s Socrates himself also makes the reverse claim in the Republic: “Nor are the same people able to do two different kinds of imitation even of things that seem very similar to each other, such as writing both comedy and tragedy” (οὐδὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα ἐγγὺς ἀλλήλων εἶναι δύο μιμήματα δύνανται οἱ αὐτοὶ ἁμα εὖ μιμεῖσθαι, οἷον κωμῳδίαν καὶ τραγῳδίαν ποιοῦντες, Republic 395a).
3 Seidensticker (2008), more than twenty years after Taplin, makes an almost identical argument, concluding that “even the few elements which comedy and tragedy have in common (theater space, masks and costumes, chorus, dance, and music) serve more to differentiate than to link the genres.”
new challenge to Taplin: far from a ‘reluctance to overlap’, I have argued that, in the case of
Aristophanes and Euripides, there is a considerable amount of thematic overlap, and that over
the period of two decades the comedian and the tragedian gradually expanded a common
repertoire from which they responsively developed variations on the same themes. Furthermore,
this exploration of shared themes was for both playwrights an endeavor that was especially
productive of their characteristic brands.

Taplin and those who follow him exclude the Bacchae from their analysis, conceding that
it is a tragedy that contains many elements of comedy.⁵ He argues that the Bacchae is the
exception that proves the rule: “this confirms rather than weakens the distinction between the
two genres before this last brilliant breakdown.”⁶ But this exceptionalist reading fails to take into
account the way in which the Bacchae serves as the culmination of decades of intertextual
interaction between Aristophanes and Euripides. The Bacchae is not a unique moment of
extensive generic hybridity, but rather one part of the gradual accretion of shared material
between two playwrights.

I argued in my fourth chapter that the Bacchae incorporates comic transvestism from the
Thesmophoriazusae in a quintessentially tragic frame, creating a fusion of comic tropes and tragic
structure. But the Thesmophoriazusae is already a comedy that appropriates extensively from
Euripides, not only through multiple explicit parodies of Euripides’ tragedies, but also by
developing its own variation on Euripidean themes such as the problematic nature of dramatic
female sôphrosynê. The comedy that the Bacchae responds to is itself full of tragedy. Further
complicating the intertextual dynamic is the fact that some of the tragedies mocked in the

⁵ Foley (1980) 125-6 particularly argues that the Bacchae proves that Socrates’ proposition that the same
man could write tragedy and comedy was possible.
Thesmophoriazusae, including the Telephus and the Helen, are themselves implicated in another succession of developing variations on a theme, as I argued in my second chapter. In the Acharnians, Aristophanes claims that Euripides creates pathos in plays such as the Telephus by dressing his characters in extremely ragged costumes; Dicaeopolis reasons that he too will be able to stir the sympathy of the chorus by wearing Euripidean rags. Euripides then developed new variations on this theme in the Electra and Helen, creating heroes who self-consciously manipulate the reactions of their enemies by drawing attention to their exceptionally ragged garb.

When the Bacchae responds to and appropriates from the Thesmophoriazusae – itself an Aristophanic comedy that parodies Euripidean tragedies influenced by Aristophanes’ earlier parody of Euripides – the result is more than a transgressive incorporation of comic material into tragedy. It is a hybrid of Aristophanic and Euripidean elements, a fusion of the special characteristics of an exceptional comedian and an exceptional tragedian who deeply influenced each other’s careers.
APPENDIX 1

TIMELINE OF THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES AND OLD COMEDY

M = approximate date suggested by metrical evidence of resolved trimeters
H = date attested in hypothesis

455 Euripides, Daughters of Pelias (according to the Life of Euripides)
438 Euripides, ALCESTIS (H)
Euripides, Telephus (see Alcestis)
Euripides, Cretan Women (see Alcestis)
Euripides, Alcmæon in Psophis (see Alcestis)

>431 Euripides, Aegeus (thought to predate Medea)
Euripides, Cretans (M)
Euripides, Hippolytus Kalyptomenos (generally thought to predate extant Hippolytus)

431 Euripides, MEDEA (H)
Euripides, Philoctetes (see Medea)
Euripides, Dictys (see Medea)
Euripides, Theristae (see Medea)

c. 430 Euripides, HERACLIDAE (M)
Cratinus, Dionysalexandros (hypothesis refers to satire of Pericles for causing a war, most likely the Samian War)

428 Euripides, HIPPOLYTUS (H)
427 Aristophanes, Banqueters (P.Oxy. 2737 3-5)
426 Aristophanes, Babylonians (Σ Acharnians 378)

>425 Euripides, Bellerophon (parodied at Acharnians 426-9)
Euripides, Danae (M)
Euripides, Thyestes (Σ Acharnians 433)
Euripides, Ino (parodied at Acharnians 434)
Euripides, Oeneus (parodied at Acharnians 418-9)
Euripides, Phoenix (parodied at Acharnians 418-22)
Euripides, Protesilaus (M)

425 Aristophanes, ACHARNIANS (H)
Cratinus, Kheimazomenoi (see Acharnians)
Eupolis, Noumeniai (see Acharnians)
c. Euripides, *Cresphontes* (connected to Athens’ activity in Messenia?)
Euripides, *Antiope* (M)
Euripides, *ANDROMACHE* (M)

424
Aristophanes, *KNIGHTS* (H)
Cratinus, *Saturoi* (see *Knights*)

>423
Euripides, *HECUBA* (parodied at *Clouds* 1165)
Euripides, *Aeolus* (parodied at *Clouds* 1370-3)

423
Aristophanes, *Clouds* I (attested in hypothesis to *Clouds* II)
Cratinus, *Pytinē* (see *Clouds* I)
Aristophanes, *Merchant Ships* (attested in hypothesis to *Peace*, possibly mentioned at *Wasps* 1038)

c. Euripides, *SUPPLIANTS* (M)
Aristophanes, *Farmers* (mentions Nicias resigning at Pylos in 424 and was likely written before Cleon’s death in 422)
Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* II

<423
Euripides, *Temenidae* (M)

>422
Euripides, *Sthenboea* (parodied at *Wasps* 111-2, 1074)
Euripides, *Theseus* (parodied at *Wasps* 312-4)

422
Aristophanes, *WASPS* (H)
Aristophanes, *Proagōn* (hypothesis to *Wasps*)
Euripides, *Erectheus* (dated by Plutarch in his *Life of Nicias; terminus ante quem* of 411 from parody at *Lysistrata* 1135)

421
Aristophanes, *PEACE* I (H)
Eupolis, *Maricas* (*Σ Clouds* 553)

420
Eupolis, *Autolycus* (Athenaeus 216D)

c. 420
Euripides, *Phaethon* (M)
Euripides, *Melanippe the Wise* (M; *terminus ante quem* from parody at *Thesmo.* 546-8)

<420
Euripides, *Antigone* (M)
Euripides, *Ixion* (referred to 420 death of Protagoras, according to Philochorus)

>419
Euripides, *ELECTRA* (M)
<419
Euripides, *Meleager* (M)
Euripides, *Oedipus* (M)

c. 418-6
Aristophanes, *CLOUDS* II (*Σ Clouds* 591)
<417
Aristophanes, *Anagyros* (mentions Eupolis’ attacks on Hyperbolus, who was ostracized before 416)

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1 The relative dating of the two *Thesmophoriazusae* plays is the topic of much debate; see Chapter 3, p. 139, n. 19.
c. 416  Euripides, HERACLES (M)  
Euripides, Eurystheus? (Kannicht connects with Heracles)  

415  Euripides, TROADES (tetralogy attested by Aelian 2.8)  
Euripides, Alexandros (see Troades)  
Euripides, Palamedes (see Troades)  
Euripides, Sisyphus (see Troades)  

>414  Euripides, Pleisthenes (possibly parodied at Birds 1232)  

414  Aristophanes, BIRDS (H)  
Aristophanes, Amphiaraos (hypothesis to Birds)  

<414  Euripides, Auge (M)  

c. 413  Euripides, IPHIGENEIA IN TAURIS (M; similarities to Helen and Andromeda)  

412  Euripides, Andromeda (Σ Frogs 53)  
Euripides, HELEN (Σ Thesmo. 850, 1012)  

c. 412  Euripides, Melanippe Desmotis (M; similarities to Helen and Andromeda)  
Euripides, ION (M; similarities to Helen and Andromeda)  
Eupolis, Demes (political allusions within the play; terminus post quem 418 from a reference to Mantinea)  

<412  Euripides, Archelaus (biographical tradition on when Euripides was in Macedonia)  
Euripides, Polyidus (M)  
Euripides, PHOENISSAE (terminus post quem attested by Σ Frogs 53)  
Euripides, Hypsipyle (see Phoenissae)  
Aristophanes, Peace II (political events referenced within the play)  
Aristophanes, Lemniae (contains parody of IT 30-3)  

411  Aristophanes, LYSISTRATA (H)  
Aristophanes, THESMOPHORIAZUSAE I (refers at line 1060 to a performance of Andromeda in the previous year)  
<411  Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae II (generally thought to postdate Thesmo. I)  
Aristophanes, Phoenissae (parodies Euripidean play of same name)  

>410  Euripides, Alcmen (M)  

408  Aristophanes, Wealth I (Σ Wealth 179)  
Euripides, ORESTES (Σ Orestes 371)  

c. 407  Aristophanes, Gerytades (Euripides is not in Athens, but Agathon is)  

405  Aristophanes, FROGS (H)  
Euripides, BACCHAE (Σ Frogs 66-7)  
Euripides, IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS (see Bacchae)  
Euripides, Alcmaeon in Corinth (see Bacchae)  

>400  Aristophanes, Danaids (contained a parabasis)  

<399  Aristophanes, Storks (mentions contemporary poets Meletus and Patroclus and
politician Neoclines)
c. 391 Aristophanes, *ECCLESIAZUSA E* (internal references at lines 197-8, 202-3, and 823-9 suggest a Corinthian War date after the dismissal of Conon)
388 Aristophanes, *WEALTH II* (H)
387 Aristophanes, *Kokalos* (hypothesis to *Wealth II*)
386 Aristophanes, *Aiolosikon II* (hypothesis to *Wealth II*)
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375-416.


