

PARACOMEDY

CRAIG JENDZA, *Paracomedy: Appropriations of Comedy in Greek Tragedy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2020. Pp. 312. ISBN: 9780190090937.

JENDZA EXPLORES Greek paracomedy, that is, the appropriation of comic tropes by the tragedians, or else, the reverse of the well acknowledged and much studied phenomenon of paratragedy. There have been smaller contributions on this topic before, including one by myself on the *Bacchae*, but this is the first time that paracomedy receives the full-scale, book-size attention it deserves. Jendza is not concerned with *comic* (i.e. humorous or funny) elements in Greek tragedy, but with *comedy* (i.e. generically marked) elements in it. In this sense, paracomedy is a prominent rather than exceptional phenomenon (3–4). Besides, if tragedy openly and frequently alludes to epic and lyric, then why reject similar relations to comedy? (6).

The first chapter lays out the author's methodology, which is suggested as a model for identifying paracomedy. The first step is to detect *distinctive*, i.e. unique or rare, *correspondences* between tragic and comic elements; second, to establish the *priority of the comic* element, i.e. whether the source-comedy indeed predates the tragedy in question; and finally, to ascertain the *motivation* for adopting features from outside tragedy. The motivations may be internal to the play, such as to create an effect of disquieting confusion that serves the plot, or external to it, e.g. for the sake of literary rivalry. On that matter, we only have evidence for the back-and-forth rivalry between Aristophanes and Euripides, which is what Cratinus meant by the coinage *ἐὐριπιδαριστοφανίζειν*, Jendza argues (unconvincingly to me). Aeschylus and Sophocles make limited use of paratragedy; Euripides makes extensive use in his late period, and that period is stylistically distinct precisely because of the surge of paracomedy.

The second chapter discusses three cases of early paracomedy. The *Eumenides* has an episodic prologue, a chorus who is hostile but then favourable towards the protagonist, a shift of dramatic space from Delphi to Athens, a happy procession at the end, reference to contemporary politics (the Areopagus reformation), obscene language, and a chorus of supernatural,

animal-like females. Of all these elements, which are more frequent in, or exclusive to comedy, Jendza prioritises the portrayal of the Furies. He then reads *Alcestis* as a protest-play against the Decree of Morychides (447/6 BC) which forbade *κωμωδεῖν*. Euripides deliberately misinterpreted the letter of the law, showing how it would be to have no *kômos*-song: he composed a satyr play, *Alcestis* being the last part of a tetralogy, without a chorus of satyrs! On top of that, he added a drunk and gluttonous Heracles, both a comic and a satiric figure, in an act of poetic solidarity. The play is intentionally tragic, rather comic, and rather satyric, because Euripides wanted to defend poetry as a whole. I find the overall argument convincing — but not the suggestion that later archons specified the Degree, making it against *ὀνομαστί κωμωδεῖν* in particular, because of Euripides’ “protest” (62). A paracomical Heracles also features in Euripides’ eponymous play. The insanity of the hero is highlighted by his animalistic dance — an unusual symptom for tragic madness — which possibly draws on Philocleon’s madness scene in *Wasps*. One key difference is that Heracles is not drunk; his madness is tragic, whereas Philocleon’s madness is “tragic” (73).

The third chapter explains Euripides’ paracomical costuming choices. Aristophanes parodied Euripides’ beggar-king Telephus in *Acharnians* and dressed the tragedian and his friends in women’s clothes in *Thesmophoriazusae*. In response and in defence of tragedy, Euripides deliberately (93) employed rags, again, for his Menelaus in *Helen*, and presented transvestite men in *Bacchae* (Tiresias, Cadmus, Dionysus, Pentheus), to prove that such “comic” outlooks can better fit tragedy. While Aristophanes blamed Euripides for using such “old-fashioned” costumes, the tragedian showed how novel they are: whereas in *Acharnians* Telephus’ rags are ineffective for the protagonist, Menelaus’ rags prove beneficial (*Hel.* 1081-2); and whereas cross-dressing in *Thesmophoriazusae* is hilarious, Pentheus’ cross-dressing is gruesome. In this metapoetic dialogue on costumes, Euripides had the final say.

The fourth chapter is a detailed analysis of paracomedy in *Helen*. For Jendza, the entire play is structured as a discourse on the relationship between tragedy and comedy, with Helen representing the former genre, Menelaus the latter, and Helen/tragedy proving superior at the end. The play has essentially two prologues, one spoken by each partner, and Menelaus’ part is paracomical: he makes ghoulish jokes, boasts like an *alazôn*, assaults a doorkeeper (in a scene drawing on *Acharnians*), and has no interaction with the tragic chorus. Throughout the play, Euripides highlights the contrast between Helen’s beauty and Menelaus’ ugliness to incarnate the *spoudaion/geloion* contrast between the two genres. Then Menelaus’ difficulty

to recognise Helen stands for comedy's inability to acknowledge Euripides' novelty: the paracomical hero is sceptical not because of stupidity, as scholars often admit, but because he lacks information/aspects of the myth that Euripides himself invented and Helen had outlined in her prologue. Finally, Helen becomes a *didaskalos* who instructs Menelaus in her escape plan; based on her orders, he requests from Theoclymenus a series of props, in another paracomical appropriation of *Acharnians*; in other words, comedy submits to tragedy. Overall, I believe that this reading takes away too much of *Helen's* aesthetic autonomy and is based on too many hypothetical premises, but each subsection is well argued.

The fifth chapter reads *Orestes* as a play which responds to Aristophanes' parody of Euripides' earlier tragedies (*Helen*, *Palamedes*, *Andromeda* and *Telephus*) in *Thesmophoriazusae*. "It seems that Euripides was attempting to outdo Aristophanes at his own game by using paracomedy the way Aristophanes used paratragedy" (168). In *Helen*, sword-bearing men (*ξίφηφόρος*, 1072) help Menelaus and Helen escape; in *Thesmophoriazusae* Aristophanes paratragedically has the razor-bearing Agathon (*ξυροφορεῖς*, 218) help Kinsman escape; and in *Orestes* Euripides claims the device back, having Orestes and Pylades use swords to escape (*ξίφηφόρος*, 1504). In tragedy the device is successful, unlike in comedy. Same with the oar blades in *Palamedes*, the echo in *Andromeda*, and hostage-taking in *Telephus*: the functionality and dramatic tension of these devices in the original tragedies is nullified by *Thesmophoriazusae* and then restored by *Orestes*.

The sixth chapter is a methodological exercise: if there is an allusive relationship between a tragedy and a comedy and at least one of them is undated, then which play comes first? Deciding whether the relationship is one of paratragedy or of paracomedy is a helpful gauge for the relative chronology of the plays. "Weighing the evidence for paracomedy against the evidence for paratragedy [Jendza] support[s] the following claims: (1) Sophocles's *Chryses* very likely dates to after 414 BCE, (2) Euripides's *Cyclops* more likely than not dates to 408 BCE, (3) Euripides's *Heracles* almost certainly dates to between 420 and 416 BCE, (4) Euripides's *Antiope* probably dates to 410–408 BCE, and (5) Aristophanes's *Women at the Thesmophoria II* probably dates to 409–406 BCE. A sixth allusive relationship, between Euripides's *Ion* and Aristophanes's *Birds* (414 BCE), has evidence in favor of each chronology that is equipollent" (219). I am not convinced by some of these proposals, or indeed about the applicability of the method in the case of extremely fragmentary plays. For example, Jendza's preference for an *Agamemnon* > *Birds* > *Chryses* relative chronology

(instead of *Agamemnon* > *Chryses* > *Birds*), suggesting that *Chryses* paracomically alludes to *Birds*, is based on a three-word fragment surviving from *Chryses* (μακέλλη Ζηνὸς ἐξαναστροφῆ, fr. 727) and on the assumption that because Aeschylus and Aristophanes use the variant Διὸς instead of Ζηνὸς, these two plays must be closer to each other than to *Chryses*. Despite my reservations about individual cases, the overall enterprise is admirable.

The final chapter investigates three postclassical engagements with paracomedy. First is *Rhesus*, which employs paracomedy but without a metapoetic intention as in Euripides. The play's consecutive entrances and exits, the fourth actor, and the transfiguration of a divinity (Athena) to another divinity (Aphrodite) are all comic practices. Even more, *Rhesus* features paracomical scenes: a guessing-game between Hector and Dolon and a violent chorus searching for the intruders Odysseus and Diomedes, imitating the chorus in *Acharnians*. None of these has any literary implications. Jendza moves on to Rhinthon's *phlyax* plays, suggesting that they employed a form of paracomedy similar to Euripides'. The evidence is sparse, but the surviving titles of Rhinthon's plays as well as some fragments suggest common themes (e.g. a gluttonous Hercules, like in *Alcestis*) and a metatheatrical intention. Finally, Jendza discusses Pollux's claim that parabases are distinctively comic but Sophocles and Euripides employed them too. Of course, we have nothing resembling a "tragic parabasis" in the surviving corpus. Pollux probably meant some parabolic content in the widest sense possible, such as the "victory codas" found in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Phoenissae*, and *Orestes* (262-3).

The book is a substantially revised and expanded version of Jendza's 2013 doctoral thesis at The Ohio State University (available online). All parts of the thesis were rearranged, technically rewritten, and many sections were added; the book's final chapter is entirely new. Bibliography up to 2018 has been used. Excellent writing style — I never had to read back — meticulous copyediting, and very rich indexes, general and locorum. The author is to be congratulated both on his effort and on the final product. Essentially, we now have a much-awaited counterpart to Rau's *Paratragodia* (1967) and Farmer's *Tragedy on the Comic Stage* (2017). The book should find a place in all libraries covering Greek drama, and its introduction, I believe, should be given as standard reading to any student of tragedy at college.

DIMITRIOS KANELLAKIS

University of Oxford

dimitrios.kanellakis@classics.ox.ac.uk