

Euripides as a *komoidoumenos*: Poetic Competition and Intertextuality in Athenian Drama

In this paper, I explore the comic rivalry among dramatists in classical Athens by examining both Euripides' portrayal as a character in comic fragments and his own use of comic references in his tragedies. Scholars such as Rosen (2005) and Tzanetou (2002) have shown through extant comic plays that this rivalry was often staged as a competition between tragedy and comedy. Building on their work, I shift focus to the fragmentary plays of Old Comedy. In particular, I examine instances of paratragedy (tragic elements in comedies) in these comic fragments and paracomedy (comic elements in tragedies) in Euripides' own works, which uncover a broader dialogue between the two genres and offer insights into the role of intertextuality within Athenian drama. I argue that the parody of Euripides in these fragments provides us additional evidence for the existence of this rivalry and further insight into its nature.

Poetic competition was a core element of Athenian comedy. The *parabasis* offered the opportunity for mutual mockery and personal attacks between poets (Kyriakidi 2007), often reflecting existing rivalries. However, competition of this sort was not confined to comedy. It is also extended into the realm of tragedy. Despite the genre-related distinction between tragedy and comedy, scholars have identified features that are traditionally ascribed to tragedy in comedy and vice versa (Farmer 2017). Occurrences of paratragedy and paracomedy point to a wider dialogue between tragic and comic playwrights. Euripides, in particular, exemplifies this interaction as he frequently became a target of comedic mockery (*komoidoumenos*) in Old Comedy (Καραμάνου 2011).

While Aristophanes' extant plays provide the most well-known examples of Euripides being lampooned, similar attacks appear in other plays, now surviving only in fragments. These

include, but are not limited to, Telekleides (fr. 41 and 42 K-A), Plato Comicus (fr. 29 K-A), and Aristophanes (fr. 392, 596, 682, and 694 K-A). My focus here is on paratragic allusions in these fragments in which Euripides' style, portrayal of characters, or alleged cooperations in composing his tragedies are parodied. The attacks are often informed by material from Euripides' own tragic corpus to undermine his dramatic authority. Additionally, I show that Euripides becomes a recurring comic *topos*, employed by other poets to launch attacks on rival playwrights (Cratinus fr. 342 K-A) or even actors (Strattis fr. 1 K-A).

While paracomedy occurs less frequently than paratragedy, comic allusions in Euripides' tragedies enhance the dynamic dialogue between the two genres. The tragedian subtly incorporated comic features into his plays, thus making himself an active participant in the poetic competition among and between tragic and comic poets. Scholars have traced such elements in several of his tragedies, including *Helen*, *Orestes*, *Trojan Women*, *Bacchae*, *Ion*, etc. (Hanink 2014; Kanellakis 2019). I will discuss a representative selection of these examples in order to illustrate the ways in which Euripides participated in the two-way dialogue between genres.

These metatheatrical exchanges illuminate the intertextual dialogue between comic and tragic genres in classical Athenian drama. Within this framework, comic rivalry becomes particularly apparent in comic fragments where poets borrow characters, stylistic features, or entire plots to mock their rivals. Similarly, Euripides' plays offer further evidence of this rivalry. Ultimately, the investigation of this poetic competition enriches the ongoing dialogue between comedy and tragedy.

Works Cited

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