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**Euripides versus Aristophanes, *Ion* versus *Birds*: A possibility of “paracomic”
referentiality***

Of the extant plays by Euripides, *Ion* is certainly –and on many levels– one of the most controversial, which is probably why it is one of the least preferred when it comes to staging the ancient tragic theatrical discourse according to the conventions prevailing in each era¹. The play has been described at times as a “fairy tale”, a play “with a very light atmosphere” and a “romantic aspect”, with “a serious intent, although lacking the tragic tone of most tragedies”, “certainly not a tragedy”, a “strange enchanting play”, “containing comic grotesque scenes bordering on the farcical”, a “poetic game”, a “melodrama”, a “pure comedy”, “the earliest modern comedy”, a “tragic-comedy”, a “romance”, a “comedy of intrigue”, a “kind of *drame bourgeois*”, “hardly a tragedy in the current sense of the term”, an “ironic drama”, a “light play”, a “potential tragedy” or “tragedy avoided”, and at other times as a “genuine tragedy”, a “Sophoclean work”, “the *par excellence* Athenian tragic drama”, “Euripides’ most rigorously structured play with the possible exceptions of *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae*”, etc².

Ion’s exceptional flexibility with regard to genre in all its qualitative (κατὰ ποιῶν) parts is concurrent with the equally extensive multiplicity of interpretations – on both the theatrical and the academic stage– that this particular drama of Euripides has received. Confronted with this open and semantically complex horizon³ of *Ion*’s “nature of poetry which in essence tends to embrace meaning and hold it in suspension, rather than to indicate a conclusion or prescribe a course”, as Whitman

* I am most grateful to the anonymous reader, for his valuable comments on the manuscript. I also owe warm thanks to those classical scholars who have carefully read and creatively criticized my article in manuscript or shared their own valuable work in advance of publication with me: Yannis Lignades and Agis Marinis, none of whom necessarily shares my views, however.

¹ Regarding the different posterior conceptions of the “tragic” in relation to its primordial function in ancient Greek tragedy see recently Pierre Judet de La Combe, *Les tragédies grecques sont-elles tragiques?*, Montrouge 2010, passim. As far as it concerns especially Euripides’ reception from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, see also Donald J. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 9-15.

² Cf. only by way of example (with further bibliography) H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study*, London 1939, p. 311; A.P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides’ Plays of Mixed Reversal*, Oxford 1971, p. 107; Cedric H. Whitman, *Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1974, pp. 69-70; Bernard M.W. Knox, “Euripidean Comedy”, in idem, *Word and Action. Essays on the Ancient Theatre*, Baltimore 1979, pp. 250-274 [reprinted from A. Cheuse, R. Koffler (eds.), *The Rarer Action. Essays in Honor of Francis Fergusson*, New Brunswick, N.J. 1970, pp. 68-96]; Froma Zeitlin, “Mysteries of Identity and Designs of the Self in Euripides’ *Ion*”, *PCPhA* 35 (1989) 144-197, 145; Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, London & New York 1992, p. 131; Nicole Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division between the Sexes* (translated by Caroline Levine), Princeton 1994, pp. 184-186; Kevin H. Lee, *Euripides Ion* (with Introduction, Translation and Commentary by K.H. Lee), England 1997, p. 37; Laura Swift, *Euripides: Ion*, Liverpool 2008, pp. 94-100; J. Michael Walton, *Euripides. Our Contemporary*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2009, p. 66.

³ For a summary of the most fundamental semantic approaches to *Ion* see Lee, *Euripides Ion*, pp. 30-36; also Peter Burian, “Introduction”, in W.S. di Piero & P. Burian, *Euripides’ Ion* (translated by W.S. di Piero, commented by P. Burian), Oxford 1996, pp. 3-18.

suggests⁴, the only point where most modern readings of the play seem to converge is its more or less overtly pro-Athenian orientation, which aims to secure the genealogical exclusiveness of Athens in the formation of “Greek ethnic identity”⁵. An attempt which takes place at a period when the city of Athens experienced a mortal threat rather than an undisputed heyday, that is, at the bleak period of the Peloponnesian War⁶. The first performance of *Ion* is thus dated sometime in the midst of the Peloponnesian War, even though all the extensive analyses of the text, based on both external and internal criteria, have not yet resulted in a unanimously accepted date. The various dating attempts based on historical indications start in the aftermath of 419, when Alcibiades tried to build a fort at Rhion (Thuc. 5.52) which is referred to in passing in the text of *Ion* (v. 1592)⁷, and end in 412 or 411 at the latest, when the defection of the Ionian allies possibly signaled the end of Athens’ optimistic ambitions for obtaining –even if by extortion– hegemony over Greece, on the ground of genealogical constructs. These attempts either converge with or diverge from the dating attempts based primarily on metrics, which tend to set the date of the play after 415, considering the impressive sequence of the constantly increasing proportion of iambic trimeters characterizing the plays of that period⁸. These metric observations, in conjunction with others relating to structure, allow us to date the play in the middle of Euripides’ extant theatrical production and, more specifically, some time close to the year when the *Trojan Women* was staged, in other words in the middle if not the second half of the decade 420-410, most probably in the context of the competition of the City Dionysia⁹.

With this fluid material at my disposal, I will focus on one particular sequence of scenes in *Ion*, on the base of which I will advance the hypothesis of a certain intertextual correlation between this particular drama and Aristophanes’ *Birds*. This hypothesis will in turn reinforce certain assessments of the work of Euripides with regard to genre, interpretation and dating.

My focus is on the second part of *Ion*’s prologue, where the extensive monologic preamble of the god Hermes¹⁰ is followed by an equally extensive

⁴ Whitman, *Euripides*, p. 71

⁵ Swift, *Euripides: Ion*, p. 17. Cf. Guido Avezú, *Il mito sulla scena. La tragedia ad Atene*, Venezia 2003, pp. 53-55; Haijo Jan Westra, “The Irreducibility of Autochthony: Euripides’ *Ion* and Levi-Strauss’ Interpretation of the Oedipus Myth”, in J. Davidson, G. Muecke, P. Wilson (eds.), *Greek Drama III. Essays in Honour of Kevin Lee* (BICS Suppl. 87), London 2006, pp. 273-279.

⁶ See Albin Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, Göttingen 1972, p. 435.

⁷ We follow the edition *Euripides. Trojan Women, Iphigenia among the Taurians, Ion* (edited and translated by David Kovacs), Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England 1999.

⁸ Cf. Thomas B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides*, London 1967, pp. 1-9; M. Cropp – G. Fick, *Resolutions and Chronology in Euripides. The Fragmentary Tragedies* (BICS Suppl. 43), London 1985; Rainer Klimek-Winter, “Euripides in den dramatischen Agonen Athens: zur Datierung des *Ion*”, *Gymnasium* 103 (1996) 289-297.

⁹ For an overview of the question of *Ion*’s dating (and the relevant literature), see A.S. Owen, *Euripides. Ion edited with an Introduction and Commentary*, Oxford 1939, pp. xxxvi-xli; Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, pp. 425-426; Loraux, *The Children of Athena*, p. 206, n. 91; M. Pellegrino (ed.), *Euripide: Ione. Introduzione, Traduzione, Commento*, Bari 2004, pp. 28 f., and more recently Swift, *Euripides: Ion*, pp. 28-30, 104, nn. 13 and 16.

¹⁰ On the wide scope of Hermes’ monologue, see Kevin Lee, “Mood and Time in Euripidean *Ion*”, in M.S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic. Greek Theatre and Beyond*, Oxford 1996, pp. 85-109, especially pp. 85-86.

monologic scene with the young Ion himself, the protagonist, appearing for the first time. From this monologic sequence of scenes structured in three parts (vv. 82-183) which, when it ends, gives way to the Parodos of the Chorus, we will concentrate on the third and last part: The sequence begins with Ion's entry through the central door of the Delphic temple –possibly accompanied by some silent attendants who are soon seen off by himself towards the Castalian spring (vv. 94-101)¹¹– and the introductory recited anapaests, where the image of the peaceful Delphic morning is reflected on the boy who uncomplainingly serves his god (vv. 82-111) and already declares decisively that *πτηνῶν τ' ἀγέλας, αἱ βλάπτουσιν σέμν' ἀναθήματα, τόξοισιν ἐμοῖς φυγάδας θήσομεν*: “The flocks of birds, which harm the sacred offerings, I shall put to flight with my bow” (vv. 106-108). What follows is an interposed strophic pair with mesodic parts (vv. 112-143) and a subsequent astrophic part (vv. 144-153), where Ion, absorbed in his daily task of sweeping the stairs of the temple and sprinkling them with clean water, emphatically expresses the joy he feels in his sacred task¹². The third part reverts to the –now lyric or melic– anapaests expressing, through a strongly realistic, mimetic-pantomimic movement, the zeal of the young “guardian of the gold” in his effort to drive away from the temple some birds –obviously invisible to the audience¹³– that threaten its purity. As the birds start to gather, Ion threatens first an eagle, “a herald of Zeus”, whose “beak routs the strength of other birds” (vv. 158-160), then a “red-footed” swan that he sends away to the lake at Delos, Apollo's birthplace, with whom this particular bird is directly associated (vv. 161-169), and finally he drives out an –unnamed and unidentified– mother-bird (its only quality mentioned; actually implied through *τέκνοις*: “his young”, at vv. 171-172), sending it away to the “eddies of the Alpheios” (vv. 174-175) or “the groves of the Isthmus” (v. 176)¹⁴.

We are dealing with an intense scene both verbally and in terms of movement¹⁵, “half-comic”¹⁶, given that a series of trivial domestic tasks are accompanied by a song with elevated style and content: an “inconsistency” with an

¹¹ Siegfried Melchinger, *Die Welt als Tragödie. Band 2: Euripides*, München 1980, p. 78 refers to “ringing boyish voices” and to “three youths” who “run on the stage” (“Drei Jungen laufen auf den Stufen des Peristyls um die Ecke nach vorne in den hell beschiedenen Teil der Szene”) whereas Laura Swift (*Euripides: Ion*, p. 10) refers to a “group of temple attendants”, without excluding at all the possibility that Ion appears “alone” and that the “Delphic attendants of Phoebus” remain exclusively restricted to the narrative level.

¹² Cf. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, p. 96: “In the aria proper a strophic pair with the cult refrain of the paeon covers the sweeping (112-143) and the ensuing astrophic part divides between the scattering of water (144-53) and the threatening of the various birds (154-83)”.

¹³ See *infra*, n. 36.

¹⁴ Regarding these “paradoxical” threats of Ion to the “birds of augury”, “since he tells them to fly to other famous sanctuaries cf. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, pp. 136-137; Katerina Zacharia, *Converging Truths. Euripides' Ion and the Athenian Quest for Self-Definition*, Leiden–Boston 2003, p. 9; E. Hoffer, “Violence, Culture and the Workings of Ideology in Euripides' *Ion*”, *CA* 15/2 (October 1996) 289-318, 298.

¹⁵ Cf. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, pp. 95-96: “Virtuoso arias sung by actors are a favourite showpiece in Euripides' later plays. Often these monodies are accompanied by novel and picturesque choreography, and in the best examples this lyric action is closely tied in with the development of the play. [...] But the lyric does much more than accompany the picturesque choreography, it puts these tasks in the context of Ion's sacred servitude”.

¹⁶ Zacharia, *Converging Truths*, p. 9.

“amusing effect”¹⁷; a scene that is “light” in tone and style, since the danger posed by the birds is hardly serious –they build their nests on the pediments defiling the temple with their droppings– whereas Ion’s “threatening intent – to *slay the red-footed swans* (162-163) and *drown their beautiful song in blood* (168-169)– is meant seriously”¹⁸; a strange scene, which “is at one and the same time a work-song and a hymn”, a scene “often scorned for triviality by the bookish”, even though it is “one of the most memorable parts of the play in performance”¹⁹; a scene that is “difficult to interpret”, realistic but also zoologically inaccurate (there are no swans with glowing red feet) and possibly rich in “symbolic depth”²⁰; a scene featuring a “daily” task extensively and meticulously represented on stage, “unique” at least in the extant tragic literature²¹; finally, a scene which is intratextually associated at the narrative level with other birds, such as those threatening the baby-Ion after his birth and exposure (vv. 504-505, 902-904, 917; 1494-1496 or 348, 933, 951)²² or the “riotous band of doves” that will later invade Ion’s banquet and contribute to the disclosure of Creusa’s attempt to murder him (vv. 1196-1208) thanks to the poisoning of a dove – expressly?– marked as “red-legged” (v. 1207)²³.

Do we possibly have here a carefully constructed combination of “purity and violence” reflected in the distinction between Apollo’s lyre and his bows, two items “in close juxtaposition [...] opposites quite in themselves, symbols of harmony and destruction”, to both of which “Ion is living up” and with both of which he is summoned to comply²⁴? Or is it a scene that is structured and justified in primarily dramatic terms, the violent expulsion of the various birds (the powerful eagle, the peaceful swan, the female bird-mother) foreshadowing Ion’s imminent –and equally “brutal”– confrontation with Creusa and Xuthus, when he meets each of them individually for the first time and orders both of them –for different reasons– to go

¹⁷ Lee, “Mood and Time in Euripidean *Ion*”, pp. 88-89. Regarding the “amusing aspects” of Ion’s monody cf. Knox, *Word and Action*, p. 259.

¹⁸ Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, p. 133.

¹⁹ Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, p. 96.

²⁰ Γιάνγκος Ανδρεάδης (Yanos Andreadis), *Από τον Αισχύλο στον Μπρεχτ. Ολος ο κόσμος μια σκηνή (From Aeschylus to Brecht. All the world’s a stage)*, Athens 2009, pp. 168-169.

²¹ Cf. the similarities and differences between this scene and the Euripidean Electra’s entry, carrying a water jug (*El.* 54 f.), as well as Silenos and his iron rake (*Cycl.* 32 f.); Knox, *Word and Action*, p. 259. Regarding the scenes of manual domestic tasks in the extant and the fragmentary plays of ancient Greek tragedy I owe much to the still unpublished study of Yannis Lignades, “The domestic in the opening scene in *Ion*”.

²² See M.H. Giraud, “Les Oiseaux dans l’*Ion* d’ Euripide”, *RPh* LXI (1987) 83-94, 84: “Puis l’oiseau revient régulièrement dans les discours des personnages, toujours à propos d’Ion. C’est en effet ‘près de la roche au rossignol’ que Creuse se rappelled d’avoir conçu son fils (v. 1482). En ce même lieu, pense-t-elle, l’enfant a du être dévoré par des oiseaux: pure hypothèse, certes, mais hypothèse qui revient au moins quatre fois au cours de la pièce [*Ion* 504-505; 902-904; 917; 1494-1496; aux vers 348, 933 et 951 *θήρ* peut designer des oiseaux]”.

²³ See Whitman, *Euripides*, p. 76: “His whole lyrical monologue is a carefully designed combination of purity and violence, and can exist only for that reason. For quite apart from the irrationalism of expecting a single man with a bow to prevent birds from defiling the temple, we learn in a later scene, doubtless designed to comment indirectly on this one, that doves were allowed the freedom of the precinct (1198 f.). Indeed, it is one of these doves that, by drinking the poisoned libation, warns Ion of the plot against his life; and there is probably some deliberate irony in the fact that it is described as having red legs, as did the swan whom he threatened to shoot (163; 1207)”.

²⁴ See Whitman, *Euripides*, pp. 75-76.

away, just as he ordered the birds to leave the temple²⁵? More broadly, from a dramatic and symbolic point of view, is it possible to posit here a concise foreshadowing of the whole subsequent course of the play, that is, the “movement from innocence to experience”²⁶? In other words, a scene-model of “initial innocence and unwordliness” introducing us to the “obscure innocence of his Delphic daily round for pan-hellenic fame (1576)”, that Ion will abandon at the end of the play, exiting as a man and “the legitimate heir of the ancient line” in order to go to Athens and build his reputation throughout Greece²⁷? Is not Ion’s constant confrontation throughout the eponymous tragedy with at times threatening and at times salutary birds nothing else than a metaphorical reflection of the birds onto himself, a comment on Ion’s identity and fate by means of an animal symbol taken from the natural (and divine) kingdom²⁸? The birds do not function (in this particular scene and also throughout the tragedy) function as a living symbol of Delphi and of the dramatic transitional function that Delphi –as a religious, non-political and non-economic site– signifies in this particular tragedy in contradistinction to the *par excellence* geographic, political and moral site of reference that is Ion’s final destination, namely Athens? In the words of M.H. Giraud: “For the home to be revived through him, a new Erichthonian, and the race of the snake to be perpetuated in accordance with human rules, Ion had to separate from his homeland which threatened to claim him back, as with any native, so that he may rediscover it again later without being punished: he had to pass through Apollo, Delphi, the birds”²⁹.

In contrast to *Ion*, whose date, ranking and the other competing tragedies are all uncertain, extant sources are much more illuminating in the case of the *Birds*: they were performed in the socially, politically and militarily tense atmosphere of the Dionysia of 414, they were directed by Kallistratos and won the second prize above the *Komastai* of Ameipsias and below the *Monotropos* of Phrynichus³⁰. In contrast to Ion who exits the Delphic temple –his so far undisputed quasi-familial home– in an idyllic pastoral atmosphere, in order to engage in his daily tasks, the comic couple of

²⁵ See Stanley E. Hoffer, “Violence, Culture and the Workings of Ideology in Euripides’ *Ion*”, *ClAnt* 15/2 (October 1996) 289-318, 298.

²⁶ See Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, pp. 133 and 141. Cf. also Charles Segal, “Euripides’ *Ion*: Generational Passage and Civic Myth”, in M.W. Padilla (ed.), *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece: Literature, Religion, Society*, London – Toronto 1999, pp. 67-108.

²⁷ See Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, pp. 53-54, 96. Regarding the narrative and anthropological model, on which *Ion* is based and according to which an innocent and abandoned, but “chosen”, baby becomes at the end, and after a series of malchances and dangers, the founder of a famous civilization see G. Guidorizzi (ed.), *Euripide Ione*, Milano 2001, p. XI f.

²⁸ Giraud, “Les Oiseaux dans l’*Ion* d’Euripide”, p. 91.

²⁹ Giraud, “Les Oiseaux dans l’*Ion* d’Euripide”, p. 94: “Or pour que ce foyer revive, en la personne d’Ion, nouvel Érichthonios, pour que se perpétue enfin la race du serpent selon les normes humaines, il a fallu qu’Ion soit arraché à la terre natale, qui, comme tout autochtone, menaçait de le reprendre, afin de la retrouver ensuite impunément: il a fallu qu’il passe par Apollon, par Delphes, par l’oiseau”. Regarding the symbolic antithetic function of “birds” and “snakes” in Euripides’ *Ion* cf. more recently Kathryn A. Thomas, “Snakes and Birds in Euripides’ *Ion*”, p. 1 (Available from: <http://www.camws.org/meeting/2005/abstrats2005/thomas.html> - Accessed [8/4/2010]).

³⁰ We follow the edition Nigel Guy Wilson (ed.), *Aristophanis fabulae*, Tom. I, Oxford 2007; *Aristophanes. Birds – Lysistrata – Women at the Thesmophoria*, edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson, Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England 2000.

the *Birds* have left their own home in a state of disappointment in order to seek a new land that will accommodate their past frustrations and their expectations about the future. In a structurally equivalent position to Ion's monologic scene, the comic couple of Peisetaerus and Euelpides, after a quite extensive peripatetic and conversational prologue accompanied or rather guided by two birds (κολοιδός-crow, κορώνη-jackdaw, vv. 5-7 until v. 90)³¹, end up in a city composed also of birds - ὄρνεα (the word is first mentioned in v. 13), where they are welcomed at first by the repellent Trochilus, Slave of the Hoopoe Tereus (vv. 60-85), and then by the even more repellent Tereus himself (vv. 93-106), the legendary barbarian Thracian king who was once metamorphosed by the gods into a hoopoe after the abominable conclusion of his marriage with the Athenian princess Procne³².

Peisetaerus's bold idea that the birds should rule over humans and force the gods into submission by depriving them of all nourishment is immediately embraced by Tereus, who agrees to summon all the birds to listen to Peisetaerus expounding his idea, and also invites the Nightingale to accompany him –vocally or with a flute– in his singing (vv. 201-266)³³. The lyrical atmosphere and auditory ecstasy engendered by this monodic invitation in lyric anapaests, mimicking the song of the birds (vv. 226 et seq.)³⁴, is abruptly interrupted –just as Ion's pantomimic monody, also in lyrical anapaests, is interrupted– by the unconventional Parodos of the

³¹ On the semantic background and the dramatic function of these two bird-guides, see Angus M. Bowie, *Aristophanes. Myth, ritual and comedy*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 154-156.

³² As regards Tereus' mythic background and its various versions cf. by way of example Φάνης Ι. Κακριδής (Fanis I. Kakridis), *Αριστοφάνους Ορνιθες. Ερμηνευτική Έκδοση (Aristophanes' Birds. Commented edition)*, Athens–Yannina 1987, pp. 57-58, schol. ad vv. 209-222; Bowie, *Aristophanes*, pp. 167-168; David Fitzpatrick, "Sophocles' Tereus", *CQ* 51 (2001) 90-101; idem, "Reconstructing a Fragmentary Tragedy 2: Sophocles' Tereus", *Practitioners Voices in Classical Reception Studies (PVCRS)* Issue 1 (November 2007) 39-45; Gregory W. Dobrov, *Figures of Play. Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics*, Oxford 2001, pp. 105-132. On the double "nature" (*physis*) and "prudence" (*phronesis*) of Tereus who "attests to and incarnates the internal relationship between comedy and tragedy and, ultimately, through his metatheatrical auto-constitution, emerges as a point of convergence between the dramatic and the extra-theatrical reality", see Αντώνης Τσακμάκης (Antonis Tsakmakis), "Κατασκευάζοντας τον θεατή των *Ορνιθων*" ("Constructing the spectator of the *Birds*"), in Αντώνης Τσακμάκης, Μενέλαος Χριστόπουλος (Antonis Tsakmakis, Menelaos Christopoulos) (eds.), *Ορνιθες. Οψεις και αναγνώσεις μιας αριστοφανικής κωμωδίας (Birds. Aspects and Readings of an Aristophanean Comedy)*, Athens 1997, pp. 33-52, 39-40. Cf. also the interesting "parallel" between Euripides' *Ion* and Sophocles' *Tereus* and the suggestion that both plays may have explored the concept of kinship through colonization, forwarded by Katerina Zacharia, "The Rock of the Nightingale: Kinship Diplomacy and Sophocles' *Tereus*", in Felix Budelmann, Pantelis Michelakis (eds.), *Homer, Tragedy and Beyond: Essays in Greek Literature in Honor of P.E. Easterling*, London 2001, pp. 91-102.

³³ With regard to the various "stage problems" raised by this scene with the preparation and execution of the song of invitation (Who is singing? Who is playing the flute? Where is each actor standing?), cf. indicatively Carlo Ferdinando Russo, *Aristophanes. An Author for the Stage* (revised and expanded English edition, translated by Kevin Wren), London & New York 1994, p. 159; Christopher William Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes*, London 1976, pp. 72 ff.; Pascal Thiery, *Aristophane, Fiction et Dramaturgie*, Paris 1986, pp. 76-85; Horst Dieter Blume, "Music in Aristophanes' *Birds*", in Τσακμάκης, Χριστόπουλος (Tsakmakis, Christopoulos) (eds.), *Ορνιθες. Οψεις και αναγνώσεις (Birds. Aspects and Readings)*, pp. 28-29.

³⁴ Regarding Aristophanes' "high lyric poetry" in his whole extant work and, more specifically in *Birds* see analytically Michael Silk, "Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet", in *Aristophanes: Essays in Interpretation*, Cambridge 1980, pp. 99-151; Θεόδωρος Γ. Παππάς (Theodoros G. Pappas), *Ο φιλόγελως Αριστοφάνης (Laughter-Loving Aristophanes)*, Athens 1996, pp. 89-133, 155-177.

Chorus sparked off by the consecutive arrival of four birds, a “flamboyantly crimson” Flamingo, (vv. 268-273), a Mede “garbed in eccentric colour” (vv. 274-278), a second Hoopoe (vv. 279-286) and another “brightly tinted bird”, the Gobber (vv. 287-290)³⁵. The sense of surprise and wonder, but also the escalating threat and impending physical violence, culminate in the orderly procession of twenty four more birds (vv. 294-304), all named without exception, including *inter alios* a “turtledove”, a “rock dove”, a “ring dove”, a “redshank”, a “red-head shrike”, a “porphyryon” (vv. 302-304). In contrast to *Ion*, who is forced to address them unilaterally and to employ direct force vis-à-vis the voiceless birds –most probably invisible to the audience and recalled only through *Ion*’s discourse and gestures³⁶–, the comedy, thanks to its imaginative freedom, allows for the dialogic interaction between humans and birds and, by implication, for the employment of persuasion on the part of the comic hero: first as a means to ward off the birds’ physical attacks (vv. 338, 344-353, 364-365) and then as a way of swinging them round and converting them to his plan for founding his u-topia³⁷.

If we accept an earlier date for *Ion*, for example around 419, “one of the most calm and optimistic years of the war”, as Edouard Delebecque describes it, should we also assume along with the above-mentioned scholar that this “humorous” scene with the birds “must have made the Athenians smile and must have impressed

³⁵ For different views regarding the potential semantic background, dramatic function, stage presentation and spatial position of these four birds, cf. indicatively L.B. Lawler, “Four dancers in the *Birds* of Aristophanes”, *TAPhA* (1942) 58-63; Russo, *Aristophanes*, pp. 159-161; A.S. Henry, “Aristophanes’ *Birds* 268-293”, *CPh* LXXII (1977) 52-53; Κακριδής (Kakridis), *Αριστοφάνους Ορνιθες* (*Aristophanes’ Birds*), p. 67, schol. ad 268-293; Blume, “Music in Aristophanes’ *Birds*”, pp. 28-29.

³⁶ Although the deployment of real horses cannot be precluded in the ancient tragic theatrical practice, especially in those cases where the presence of a “chariot” is textually denoted and dramatically justified [cf. P.D. Arnott, “Animals in the Greek Theatre”, *G&R* (second series) 6 (1959) 177-179], in the case of *Ion*, where the birds are supposedly involved in the action, the presence of real birds on the stage should be ruled out not only for generic reasons, related to the high conventionality and non-naturalism of the tragic code, but also for obvious practical/technical reasons (cf. Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 1977, pp. 33-34; Lee, *Euripides Ion*, p. 174, schol. ad 154-81). Accordingly, the pantomimic representation of the birds by supporting (dressed up?) actors should also be rather ruled out, since there is no other documented zoomorphic presence on stage in the tragic corpus, this being a possibility that seems to have been reserved exclusively for comedy and satyr play. Nonetheless, Carl Ruck’s assumption that there are “burlesque elements” in *Ion*’s monody, that “the birds in that song were described as rather grotesquely large” and –last but not least– that “the language suggests that the scene was staged with an extra chorus of bird dancers (τίς ὄδ’ [...] 170 ff.), one of whom apparently enters with a bundle of faggots, intending to build its nest on the temple” [Carl A.P. Ruck, “On the Sacred Names of Iamos and Ion: Ethnobotanical Referents in the Hero’s Parentage”, *CJ* 71, N. 3 (Feb.-March 1976) 235-252, 259] would reinforce my hypothesis on the paracomical function of that tragic scene, as this hypothesis will be developed afterwards.

³⁷ As regards the different versions and functions of Aristophanic heroes’ utopian project see Bernhard Zimmemann, “Utopisches und Utopie in den Komödien des Aristophanes”, *WJA* 9 (1983) 57-77; Alan H. Sommerstein, “Νεφελοκοκκυγία και Γυναικόπολη: Οι ονειρικές πόλεις του Αριστοφάνη” (“Nephelococcygia and Gynaikopolis: the oneiric cities of Aristophanes”, translated in Greek by Κωνσταντίνος Πουλής – Konstantinos Poulis), in Θεόδωρος Γ. Παππάς, Ανδρέας Γερ. Μαρκαντωνάτος (Theodoros G. Pappas, Andreas Ger. Markantonatos) (eds.), *Αττική κωμωδία. Πρόσωπα και Προσεγγίσεις* (*Attic Comedy: Persons and Approaches*), Athens 2011, pp. 538-571.

Aristophanes, who used it for the purpose of imitation, not parody, in his *Birds*³⁸, where various other indirect references to the supposed tragic sub-text could also be identified³⁹? Or should we advance the reverse hypothesis –possible not least due to the fluid chronological parameters of *Ion*'s production– that it is not the *Birds* that transform and assimilate the “humorous” scene from the earlier tragedy, but it is *Ion* that refers to the preceding *Birds* and incorporates them into its intertextual substratum? In which case, we may posit a range of references, starting from the spectacular and unconventional Parodos of the comedy's zoomorphic Chorus and extending it to other parts as well, if not to the whole dramatic structure and ideological orientation of Aristophanes' comedy.

In this paper I support the latter hypothesis on the grounds that it is far more plausible to envisage this particular sequence of scenes in *Ion* citing the *Birds* with no explicit reference to its sub-textual source, rather than a typical ancient comedy of the 5th century, such as the *Birds*, citing more or less parodically a recently performed tragedy with no direct or indirect indication interfering in its textual field⁴⁰. By contrast, intertextual markers are present in the case of the –according to Sophocles– Tereus' myth which is explicitly and extensively parodied in the *Birds* (see for instance vv. 100-101: *Τοιαῦτα μέντοι Σοφοκλέης λυμαίνεται/ ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίασιν ἐμέ, τὸν Τηρέα*: “That's how shabbily Sophocles treats me –Tereus!– in his tragedies”)⁴¹; the same is true of the –most probably Aeschylean– *Prometheus Bound* on whom the homonymous dramatic character in the *Birds* is based⁴², or of the overt –for the meticulous literary scholar– paratragic references to Sophocles' *Tyro* or to Aeschylus' *Edonoi* in the description of the second of the four birds preparing the Parodos of the Chorus in the *Birds*⁴³; finally, leaving aside the *Birds*, this is what repeatedly happens in the case of all those Euripidean dramas that are alluded to – often explicitly and very extensively– in plays ranging from the *Acharnians* of 425 to the *Frogs* of 405⁴⁴. “It may at first be surprising to suggest that a tragedy alludes to a

³⁸ Édouard Delebecque, *Euripide et la Guerre du Péloponnèse*, Paris 1951, p. 226: “Ce passage dut faire sourire les Athéniens, et frapper sans doute Aristophane qui s'en servit adroitement pour une imitation, et non une parodie, dans ses *Oiseaux* [...]”.

³⁹ Ibid. Regarding the non-credibility of the “imagined references in passages of Aristophanes, e.g. to 164 ff. in *Birds* 769 ff. and to 1132 ff. in *Birds* 999 ff.” see Lee, *Euripides Ion*, p. 40.

⁴⁰ About the specific techniques (“Internal Undermining and Undermining through the Context”) and subtechniques (“Substitution”, “Change of position”, “Addition”, “Detraction”, “Excess”) of the Aristophanic parody see, through the light of modern literary theory, Stavros Tsitsiridis, “On Aristophanic Parody: The Parodic Techniques”, in idem (ed.), *Παραχορήγημα. Μελετήματα για το αρχαίο θέατρο προς τιμήν του καθηγητή Γρηγόρη Μ. Σηφάκη (Parachoregema. Essays on Ancient Theatre in Honor of Grigoris Sifakis)*, Heraklion 2009, pp. 359-382.

⁴¹ See Dobrov, *Figures of Play*, p. 124. Regarding the ambiguous precursor role of Tereus in the founding and the inception of the new world of the *Birds* see also Bowie, *Aristophanes*, pp. 167-168.

⁴² See Τσακμάκης (Tsakmakis), “Κατασκευάζοντας τον θεατή των *Ορνίθων*” (“Constructing the Spectator of the *Birds*”), pp. 36-37 (with relevant bibliography).

⁴³ See Niall W. Slater, *Spectator Politics, Metatheatrical Performance in Aristophanes*, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 137 and 287 (n. 17). Cf. Κακριδής (Kakridis), *Aristophanes' Birds (Αριστοφάνους Ὀρνίθεις)*, pp. 69-70, schol. ad 275-276.

⁴⁴ See Ralph R. Rosen, “Aristophanes, Old Comedy and Greek Tragedy”, in Rebecca Bushnell (ed.), *A Companion to Tragedy*, Massachusetts 2005, pp. 251-268, and more recently Ιωάννα Καραμάνου (Ioanna Karamanou), “Ευριπίδαριστοφάνιζον: Η πρόσληψη του Ευριπίδη στην Αρχαία Κωμωδία” (“*Euripidaristophanizon*: Euripides' Reception in Ancient Comedy”), in Παππάς, Μαρκαντωνάτος

scene of comedy, rather than the other way round. Yet we need to distinguish allusion from parody. Comedy regularly quotes and ridicules specific lines from particular tragedies. Tragedy, by contrast, occasionally alludes to comic scenes and episodes. [...] When comedy alludes to tragedy, the effect is usually parodic. Comedy invokes the serious tragic plot and the cultural values it embodies in order to deflate and domesticate them. Tragic allusion to comedy is both less common and less straightforward”: This note by John Kirkpatrick and Francis Dunn⁴⁵ corroborate our hypothesis that it is more likely that *Ion* refers –indirectly and implicitly, as expected– to the *Birds*, instead of the *Birds* referring –with no (sub)(con)notation at all, as not expected– to *Ion* (that is, unless we preclude any genuine association between them and, thus, assign any intertextual associations exclusively to the interpretive freedom and inventiveness of the reader/receiver).

It seems that tragedy –especially Euripidean tragedy– offered rather fertile ground not only for “comic elements”, in the sense of appropriating instances of the laughable in its various manifestations and nuances, but also for “elements of comedy”, in the sense of incorporating certain structural forms, characters, dramatic situations, motifs, themes and story patterns of the Ancient Comedy⁴⁶, aiming perhaps not at the comic *per se* (in the same way that comedy often uses paratragedy as an end in itself) but mainly with the purpose of intensifying tragic ambiguity, of heightening tragic passion and generating dramatic effect through constant tension, continuous shifts in sympathy and changes of perspective, consecutive emotional charge and discharge (on the part of both the dramatic characters and the spectators)⁴⁷.

Thus, while Aeschylus seems to be –at least relying on the extant corpus– Euripides’ main tragic target –an inimical attitude that will be magnified, in return, within the fictional context of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*–, it may also be the case that Aristophanes, who was a systematic adversary of Euripides already since the

(Pappas, Markontonatos) (eds.), *Αττική Κωμωδία (Attic Comedy)*, pp. 675-737 (with broad relevant bibliography).

⁴⁵ John Kirkpatrick, Francis Dunn, “Heracles, Cercopes and Paracomedy”, *TAPhA* 132 (2002) 29-61, 37-38.

⁴⁶ See Bernd Seidensticker, “Comic Elements in Euripides’ *Bacchae*”, *AJPh* 99 (1978) 303-320, an article that contributed decisively in the ever since “hotly debated” issues of the presence and function of the comic in tragedy and the relationship between tragedy and meta-theatre (cf. much earlier Anna Rearden, *A Study of Humor in Greek Tragedy*, California 1913; Walter Jens, *Euripides: Büchner*, Pfullingen 1964 [= *Opuscula aus Wissenschaft und Dichtung* 21]). For a succinct overview and application of Seidensticker’s distinction between “elements of comedy” and “comic elements” in the case of *Ion* see Katerina Zacharia, “The Marriage of Tragedy and Comedy in Euripides’ *Ion*”, in S. Jäkel, A. Timonen (eds.), *Laughter Down the Centuries*, vol. II, *Annales Universitatis Turkuensis*, ser. B, tom. 213, Turku 1995, pp. 45-63, esp. 46-47. The basic scholarly disputes on the above-mentioned issues in the field of classical studies were recently summarized by Γιάννης Λιγνάδης (Yannis Lignades), “Η πρόσληψη του κωμικού στην τραγωδία από τους σύγχρονους Έλληνες σκηνοθέτες” (“The Reception of the Comic in Tragedy as reflected in Modern Approaches by Greek Directors”), Paper read in the 4th Panhellenic Theatre Studies Conference, Department of Theatre Studies, of the University of Patras (Patras, May 26-29, 2011), on “Ancient theatre and its reception”. Under publication in the Conference Proceedings.

⁴⁷ Regarding the discussion on the function of “genre” and the potential generic mixtures and multifarious forms and tones in ancient Greek literature, ancient Greek drama and Euripidean drama, in particular, see analytically Donald J. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides. Dramatic Technique and Social Context*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 44-62.

Acharnians of 425, became occasionally –as in this instance– Euripides’ main target from the field of Ancient Comedy, especially in this rather hybrid tragedy that challenges the generic boundaries and the established expectations, at a “turning point in the history of ancient Greek drama”, ushering in its “ultimate stage of development before its decline after the death of Euripides”⁴⁸. “We are certainly touching here on a novel area of theatrical exploration: the poet does not simply exploit the expressive means inherent in the genre in order to achieve the maximum dramatic effect but, having exhausted the limits of their function, he also applies them in a scenic game that challenges the experiences and receptiveness of the audience, while integrating his contribution into a history whose previous stages are now clearly demarcated”, notes Nikos H. Chourmouziadis with regard to Euripides’ intertextual experimentations within the tragic field, which may have as well surpassed its limits and extended likewise to the domain of ancient comedy⁴⁹.

The possibility of *Ion*’s paracomical reference to *Birds* may not have been an isolated case not only in the special field of Euripidean dramaturgy but also in the wider context of 5th century tragic production. Intertextual, obvious or latent, traces of ancient comedy have already been identified –or presumed at least– in the tragic (sub)surface within the broader framework of ancient tragedy’s meta-theatrical function, a framework which, though forcefully disputed, remains –as the case in question may be– still conceivable⁵⁰. As J. Michael Walton characteristically suggests: “The reason for such comic moments and, indeed, whole scenes may be in part parodic, in part-self-referential. More, I think, they are an acknowledgement that tragedy has no rules, whatever Aristotle might later have been alleged to claim, beyond the requirement to function within a structure of dramatic rhythm and contrasting mood. I would anyway be wrong to assume that moments of light relief in Greek tragedy are a Euripidean invention. They can be found in any surviving play of Aeschylus or Sophocles [...]”⁵¹.

If we accept the hypothesis of paracomical referentiality in the case of *Ion*, then there are several implications: First of all, and very obviously, we must exclude the possibility that *Ion* dates before 414 BC, a year that is reaffirmed as *terminus ante quem*, and we must place it around 413 or 412 (that is, most probably before the final conclusion of the Sicilian Expedition and the oligarchic movement of the Four Hundred) in a stylistically and metrically affiliated group which includes *Helen*,

⁴⁸ J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, Westport, Conn. 1983, p. 211.

⁴⁹ Νίκος Χ. Χουρμουζιάδης (Nikos Ch. Chourmouziades), *Όροι και μετασχηματισμοί στην αρχαία ελληνική τραγωδία* (*Conditions and Transformations in ancient Greek Tragedy*), Athens 1984, p. 175.

⁵⁰ For different examples and different considerations about the quantitative and qualitative function of the “comic” in the tragic –mainly Euripidean– field cf. Knox, “Euripidean Comedy”, pp. 250-274; Kenneth J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1972, pp. 148-149; John Herrington, “The Influence of Old Comedy on Aeschylus’ Later Trilogies”, *TAPhA* 93 (1973) 113-125; Justina Gregory, “Comic Elements in Euripides”, in M. Cropp, K. Lee and D. Sansone (eds.), *Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century* (= *ICS* 24-25), Champaign 2000, pp. 59-74; Alan H. Sommerstein, “Comic Elements in Tragic Language: the case of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*”, in A. Willi (ed.), *The Language of Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2002, pp. 151-168; Bernd Seidensticker, “Dithyramb, Comedy and Satyr-Play”, in Justina Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 2005, pp. 38-54, 51; Kirkpatrick & Dunn, “Heracles, Cercopes and Paracomedy”, pp. 29-61; Erich Segal, “The Comic Catastrophe: An Essay on Euripidean Comedy”, *BICS* 40, Supplement 66 (1995) 46-55. See also nn. 45 and 46.

⁵¹ J.M. Walton, *Euripides. Our Contemporary*, London, 2009, p. 75.

Iphigenia in Tauris and possibly the lost *Andromeda*⁵². In that case, the intertextual relation between *Birds* 209-222 (the Hoopoe invoking Procne, the Nightingale) and Euripides' *Helen* 1107-1113 (the Chorus invoking the "nightingale of tears" to share their lamentation)⁵³, should also be reconsidered as regards its paracomical and metatheatrical potential function.

Secondly, this hypothesis adds –or rather confirms– one more comic trace among the many that have been so far sought and identified in *Ion*'s textual surface⁵⁴, and it reinforces the view that upholds the polyphonic and carnivalesque nature of this particular drama and of Euripides' late –at least– production more generally⁵⁵: a production which decisively influenced the New Comedy of the 4th century⁵⁶, where the comic and the serious or tragic are conceived not in isolation but as components of the same theatrical experience⁵⁷, forming a generically unstable amalgam of contrasting dramaturgical and experiential manifestations of the heroic and the everyday, of popular grotesque and utopian frivolity⁵⁸.

Thirdly, it reinforces the reasonable assumption of "mutual" artistic influence and, at the same time, rivalry between Euripides and Aristophanes, who followed parallel paths for a long time in the last decades of the 5th century, often both defending the same targets with different means⁵⁹. By choosing to include this particular ornithological scene in *Ion*, did Euripides come up with a scenic channel for expressing all the bitterness and the sense of violence that he experienced on the part of his threatening comic colleague, who never ceased to parody him, at least

⁵² Cf. Zacharia, *Converging Truths*, pp. 4-5 and 187-188; Swift, *Euripides: Ion*, pp. 29 and 40; Donald J. Mastrorarde, "Iconography and Imagery in Euripides' *Ion*", in Judith Mossman (ed.), *Euripides. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, Oxford 2003, pp. 295-308, 295, n. 2: "[...] See Dale 1967 [i.e. Euripides *Helen*. Edited with Introduction and Commentary by A.M. Dale, Oxford 1967] xxiv-xxviii for the metrical statistics, which are the best evidence and clearly indicate the grouping of these three plays within a few years c. 412. The precise order of composition and the dates of first production of *IT* and of *Ion* are uncertain and do not matter to the interpretation of the plays".

⁵³ For different explanations of this obvious (linguistic and metrical) relation between the two passages cf. Peter Rau, *Paratragodia. Untersuchungen einer komischen Form des Aristophanes*, München 1967, p. 195; Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, pp. 148-9; Silk, "Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet" (with further bibliography), pp. 100-105; Παππάς (Pappas), *Ο φιλόγελως Αριστοφάνης (Laughter-Loving Aristophanes)*, p. 100.

⁵⁴ Cf. Karl Matthiessen, "Der *Ion* – eine Komödie des Euripides?", in M. Geerard, J. Desmer and R. Vander Plaetse (eds.), *Opes Atticae. Miscellanea Philologica et Historica Raymondo Bogaert et Hermanno Van Looy oblate (= SEJG 31)*, 1990, pp. 271-291; Zacharia, "The Marriage of Tragedy and Comedy in Euripides' *Ion*", pp. 45-63; eadem, *Converging Truths*, pp. 150-151; Lee, *Euripides Ion*, p. 37; J.M. Walton, *Euripides. Our Contemporary*, London 2009, pp. 66-68. See also the long list of signs which are examined through the "comic" light and are summarized in the English Abstract of the article Kiso Akiko, "From Tragedy to Comedy. The Dramaturgy of Euripides' *Ion*", CS 14 (1996) 1-26 [in Japanese]. Available from: <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/Detail/detail.do?LOCALID=ART0007423407&lang=en> [Accessed 9 April 2010].

⁵⁵ About the "polyphonic", "carnavalesque" character of *Ion* and of later Euripidean dramaturgy in general, on the base of the premises posed by the radical literary terminology and conception of Mikhail Bakhtin see Zacharia, *Converging Truths*, pp. 166-176.

⁵⁶ With regard to the thematic, structural and semantic analogies between *Ion* and New Comedy see, for instance, Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy. Suffering under the sun*, Oxford 2010, p. 278.

⁵⁷ Cf. Zacharia, *Converging Truths*, p. 153; Mastrorarde, "Iconography and Imagery in Euripides' *Ion*", p. 307.

⁵⁸ On the generic uncertainty and "polychromy" of *Ion* and, more broadly, of Euripides' *oeuvre* and on the challenging effect that it may have had on its recipients, including the authors of Ancient Comedy, see Lee, *Euripides Ion*, pp. 35-38. Cf. Mastrorarde, *The Art of Euripides*, pp. 44 ff.

⁵⁹ See R.E. Wycherley, "Aristophanes and Euripides", *G&R* 15, no. 45 (Oct. 1946) 98-107.

since the extant *Acharnians* of 425⁶⁰? Or was it a parodic allusion which –far from occasionally expressing all of Euripides’ bitterness in the form of a meta-theatrical comic parenthesis – focused on specific semantic orientations of the *Birds*? In other words, is it not conceivable that, through this memorable comic scene, Euripides intended to target the deepest strata of the dramatic structure and ideological make-up of the Aristophanic comedy, wishing perhaps to challenge it through the symbolic image of the expulsion of the birds by Ion? In this case, Ion would serve here as a fictional mouthpiece for the real Euripides in his effort to protect his Athenian “home” from the menacing fissures and the bleak prospects reserved for it by the earlier comic play⁶¹.

If this is the case, then Euripides reacts dynamically –in the difficult moments experienced by Athens just before the final tragic outcome of the Sicilian Expedition– by counter-posing against the comic *Birds* a clearly Athenocentric and patriotic if not propagandistic message of optimism, through a series of persistent intertextual divergences of his own tragic drama from the comic drama of the recent theatrical past. Indicatively: instead of the motif of the flight from Athens, employed by Aristophanes, and the transition to the remote, non-topian city of birds⁶², where the behaviors of Athenian tyranny and the distressing daily reality of Athens are rather reproduced⁶³, Euripides opposes Ion’s return –after his long stay at Delphi, the center of Greece– to Athens, his appropriation of the Athenian identity being a “straightforward good and a compensation for the earlier loneliness”⁶⁴ of a hero who had until then remained marginal (“not only illegitimate but completely without identity [...] a slave lacking parents, a city and a name”)⁶⁵. Moreover, instead of the gloomy impasse and melancholic repetition envisaged by Aristophanes with the establishment of the entirely ambiguous, fantastic Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, Euripides advances or rather calls up the luminous prospect of an Athens that is the birthplace of Greek civilization and leader of all the other Greek cities; also, instead of the cosmic genealogy and cosmogonic succession invoked by Peisetaerus and the Chorus, with the former supporting and the latter confirming the superiority of the birds vis-à-vis humans in general (of whom the two Athenian fugitives are merely a metonymic specimen)⁶⁶, Euripides proposes and invents a secularized and pan-

⁶⁰ *Supra*, n. 43.

⁶¹ In contrast to the hypothesis of such a “mutual” literary exchange between comedy and tragedy, Ralph Rosen (“Aristophanes, Old Comedy and Greek Tragedy”, in Bushnell (ed.), *A Companion to Tragedy*, pp. 264-265) argues in favor of a “strangely unidirectional genuine literary rivalry”, where “comedy did provide an invaluable service for the audience in its ability to compensate for tragedy’s own lack of self-reflexivity”.

⁶² Regarding the ample “landscape” of Aristophanes’ dramatic world, see Αντώνιος Μαστραπάς (Antonios Mastrapas), “Η τοπιογραφία της Αθήνας στο έργο του Αριστοφάνη” (The Landscape of Athens in Aristophanes’ Work”, in Παππάς, Μαρκαντωνάτος (Pappas, Markantonatos) (eds.), *Αττική Κωμωδία (Attic Comedy)*, pp. 592-628.

⁶³ See Τσακμάκης (Tsakmakis), “Κατασκευάζοντας το θεατή των *Ορνίθων*” (“Constructing the Spectator of the *Birds*”), p. 50, with bibliography relevant to Peisthetairus “tyrannic features”. Cf. David Konstan, “A City in the Air: Aristophanes’ *Birds*”, *Arethusa* 23 (1990) 183-207, 200-203; Bowie, *Aristophanes*, pp. 166-177.

⁶⁴ Swift, *Euripides Ion*, p. 83.

⁶⁵ Mary Ebbott, “Marginal characters”, in Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, pp. 366-376, 370.

⁶⁶ On the “cosmogonic –parodic or not– facts presented by Aristophanes in the Anapaests (especially in verses 693-703)” of the Parabasis, see Μ. Χριστόπουλος (M. Christopoulos), “*Ωλογονία* (Αριστοφάνους

hellenic genealogy in order to justify the special genealogical supremacy of Athenians with regard to the rest of Greeks, a supremacy that is notably based on the principle of autochthony and its *par excellence* animal symbol, the snake⁶⁷. Finally, instead of the unfair Zeus, who is substituted in the end by Peisetaerus marrying his housemaid Basileia, Euripides posits a seemingly unreliable Apollo who nonetheless eventually redeems in fairness –through his representative, Athena– his faithful and friends⁶⁸, even after many years of waiting for the fulfillment of the god’s caprice and only after confronting the necessities of the time lost⁶⁹. More generally, in contrast to the relentless criticism waged systematically by the Ancient Comedy, and particularly in this case by Aristophanes’ *Birds*, against Athens and its institutional, social, political, economic and moral deficiencies and dysfunctions, tragedy –*Ion* in that particular case– tends more often to portray Athens and its most prominent representatives under a primarily positive –though in no way one-dimensional or monochromatic– light⁷⁰ as a place where heroes can find refuge and salvation from other mythical cycles or lands⁷¹.

Last but not least, such a possibility of paracommic referentiality presupposes a further expansion of the limits of the receptive openness and the readily available decoding abilities of the ancient audience, who were invited to identify and distinguish between the different inter-textual and inter-performative references employed and foregrounded –at the level of discourse and spectacle– not only by the

Ορνιθες 693-703” [“*Oogonia* (Aristophanes’ *Birds* 693-703”], in Τσακμάκης, Χριστόπουλος (Tsakmakis, Christopoulos) (eds.), *Ορνιθες (Birds)*, pp. 53-68.

⁶⁷ With regard to the autochthony in Euripides’ *Ion* and the snake as principle and symbol *par excellence* of the royal lineage of the Athenians cf. C. Wolff, “The Design and Myth in Euripides’ *Ion*”, *HSPH* 69 (1965) 169-194; Giraud, “Les Oiseaux dans l’*Ion* d’Euripide”, pp. 83-84; Mastronarde, “Iconography and Imagery in Euripides’ *Ion*”, pp. 163-176; V.J. Rosivach, “Earthborns and Olympians: The Parodos of the *Ion*”, *CQ* 27 (1977) 284-294; A Saxonhouse, “Myths and the Origins of Cities: Reflections on the Autochthony Theme in Euripides’ *Ion*”, in J.P. Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, Berkeley, Calif. 1986, pp. 252-73; Loraux, “Autochthonous Kreousa: Euripides’ *Ion*”, in *The Children of Athena*, pp. 184-236.

⁶⁸ Cf. Gary S. Meltzer, *Euripides and the Poetics of Nostalgia*, Cambridge 2006, p. 148: “Both plays (*Helen*, *Ion*) take refuge in a certain nostalgia for a divine voice that is ultimately just, even if it is not truthful”.

⁶⁹ For different conceptualizations of the dramaturgical and ideological treatment of the divine element, as represented here in an exemplary way by Apollo, cf. A.P. Burnett, “Human Resistance and Divine Persuasion in Euripides’ *Ion*”, *CPh* 57 (1962) 89-103; G. Gellie, “Apollo in the *Ion*”, *Ramus* 13 (1985) 93-101; V. Giannopoulou, “Divine Agency and Tyche in Euripides’ *Ion*: Ambiguity and Shifting Perspectives”, *ICS* 24-25 (1999-2000) 257-271; K. Hartigan, *Ambiguity and Self-Deception: The Apollo and Artemis Plays of Euripides*, Frankfurt/M., Bern, New York, Paris 1991; Michael Lloyd, “Divine and Human Action in Euripides’ *Ion*”, *A&A* 32 (1986) 33-45; J.E. Thornburn, “Apollo’s Comedy and the Ending of Euripides’ *Ion*”, *AC* 44 (2001) 221-236; Ν.Π. Μπεζαντάκος (N.P. Bezantakos), *Το αφηγηματικό μοντέλο του Greimas και οι τραγωδίες του Ευριπίδη. Αλκηστis, Μήδεια, Ιππόλυτος, Ανδρομάχη, Ίων, Ιφιγένεια η εν Ταύροις (Greimas’ Actantial Model and Euripides’ Tragedies: Alcestis, Medea, Hippolytus, Andromacha, Ion, Iphigenia at Tauris)*, Athens 2004, pp. 109-125.

⁷⁰ Cf. Lee, *Euripides Ion*, p. 34: “Such a patriotic theme might have been comforting at a time when Athens faced both internal disturbance and rebellion from without. On the other hand, it may have challenged the Athenians to see that the present war was a fratricidal conflict among those with common roots. It is, in any case, impossible to view the patriotic elements simply as incidental ‘political superstructure’, unrelated to the effect of the play as a whole”.

⁷¹ “When Athenian rulers do behave less than perfectly, they do so when they are temporarily away from Athens, thus distancing them from the city (for example, Aegeus in *Medea* is passing through Corinth; Theseus in *Hippolytus* is at Troezen)”, notes Swift, *Ion*, p. 83.

more blatant, articulate and denotative ancient comic performance but also by the more discrete, allusive and connotative tragic performance in all the various semiotic sub-systems of theatrical practice⁷². “I suspect that a single gesture or a single syllable was often sufficient to indicate paratragedy. The many common features of the two genres make it easy to indicate parody by means of their differences, and this helps to account for the pervasiveness of paratragedy in Old Comedy”, observes Oliver Taplin with regard to the terms of reception of the Aristophanic inter-text by the ancient audience at both the auditory and the visual level⁷³, an observation which could apply just as well to the case of the tragic paracomedy.

On the other hand, this hypothesis regarding a certain type of referentiality confirms in its turn the considerable quantitative and qualitative, semiotic and semantic loss affecting any modern performance of ancient tragedy in terms of both production and reception, since the relevant references (linguistic, paralinguistic, gestural, mimetic, musical, scenographic or costume-related), which may have been dramatically significant and ideologically loaded at the time, remain more or less inactive for the intellect and the senses of the contemporary audience. Compared to its ancient counterpart, the contemporary audience is remarkably heterogeneous in both its general knowledge and its specialized background with regard to the theatrical performances they have attended and/or the theatrical texts they have read. Thus, if the more or less overt visual and verbal references of *Ion* to the earlier *Birds* (or the reverse...) could be decoded by the ancient spectators, most of whom had attended –at a short interval– both individual performances, a similar attempt at establishing an internal association between two modern performances of *Ion* and the *Birds* would falter at the heterogeneous, scattered and fragmentary knowledge of the contemporary audience, which has a diverse composition in terms of age, gender and race.

In the *Thesmophoriazusae* of 411 Aristophanes will again pick up the baton, this time parodying Euripides’ recently staged tragedies *Andromeda*, *Helen* and *Palamedes*, while in *Lysistrata* of the same year (411), *Ion*’s Athenocentric orientation will be comically transmuted into the pan-hellenic peace plan of *Lysistrata*, who becomes the leader (not on genealogical grounds but purely thanks to her political activity) of all Greek women –in a comedy that treats war from a feminine perspective, a dramaturgical and ideological tactic much favored by Euripides⁷⁴. And a few years after the performance of *Birds*, where two Athenians dared to fly –like birds– away from Athens in order to found a new city, Euripides himself, for reasons that remain obscure, will also “fly” away from Athens to the Macedonian court of

⁷² With regard to the potential semiotic means of the theatrical intertextuality both on acoustic and on visual level see M. Issacharoff, *Le spectacle du discours*, Paris 1985, pp. 57-65, mainly pp. 62-65.

⁷³ O. Taplin, “Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: a *Synkrisis*”, *JHS* 106 (1986) 163-74, 170 [repr. in E. Segal (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Aristophanes*, Oxford 1996, pp. 9-28]. Cf. more recently Tsitsiridis, “On Aristophanic Parody”, p. 379: “It is obvious from this definition that, apart from texts, the potential objects of parody may be mimic and gestures, paralinguistic phenomena (accent and intonation habits, manner of recitation etc.), the products of the visual arts, musical works, as well as all phenomena and behaviours of a semiotic character and social function (e.g. rituals, the ceremonies, festivals, professional codes). [...] Things get even more complicated when we take into account that in some cases parody must have included music and dance”.

⁷⁴ For a global overview of this “fruitful topic of research” (with relevant bibliography) see recently Matronarde, “Women”, in *The Art of Euripides*, pp. 246-279.

Archelaus⁷⁵. The magical journey of continuous artistic and ideological cross-fertilization would soon come to its end.

Abstract

Euripides versus Aristophanes, *Ion* versus *Birds*: A possibility of “paracommic” referentiality

On the base of the third part of *Ion*'s monologic prologue (vv. 154-183), where the homonymous young guardian of the Delphic temple, through a strongly realistic, mimetic-pantomimic movement, tries and manages to drive away from the temple some “birds” that threaten its purity, I shall advance the hypothesis that this particular passage (if not *Ion* in its entirety) recalls intertextually –on verbal and visual level– and alludes critically to the Parodos of Aristophanes' *Birds* (if not to *Birds* in their entirety). The hypothesis of paracommic referentiality in the case of *Ion* has several implications: First of all, and very obviously, it forces us to exclude the possibility that *Ion* dates before 414 BC. Secondly, this hypothesis adds –or rather confirms– one more “comic” trace among the many that have been so far sought and identified in *Ion*'s textual surface. Thirdly, it reinforces the reasonable assumption of “mutual” artistic influence between Euripides and Aristophanes, who followed parallel paths for a long time in the last decades of the 5th century. Last but not least, such a possibility of paracommic referentiality presupposes a further expansion of the limits of the receptive openness and the readily available decoding abilities of the ancient audience, who were invited to identify and distinguish between the different inter-textual and inter-performative references employed not only by the more blatant, articulate and denotative ancient comic performance but also by the more discrete, allusive and connotative tragic performance.

Keywords

Aristophanes, Euripides, *Ion*, *Birds*, paratragedy, meta-theatre.

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⁷⁵ “Was he contemplating his own metamorphosis from *autochthonous* to *eleutheros* when he wrote *Ion*? Were the snakes and the birds holding combat in Euripides' soul?”, wonders Kathryn Thomas., “Snakes and Birds in Euripides' *Ion*”, p. 2.

