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Paracomedy in Euripides' *Bacchae*\*

The term “paracomedy” was introduced by Sidwell (1993), denoting Aristophanes’ parodying of Eupolis’ comedy. Soon later, Scharffenberger (1995 & 1996) used it for the appropriation of specific comic themes in tragedy. By analogy with “paratragedy”, the term was eventually established with the later, inter-generic sense, which I adopt in this paper<sup>1</sup>. I will discuss the basic manifestations of paracomedy in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, namely the themes / scenes of illusory youthfulness and transvestism<sup>2</sup>. To establish their status as paracomical, I draw on earlier and later Aristophanic comedies, locating analogies and/or influences. Secondly, a special emphasis is placed on understanding how the received comic material supports the tragic effect; for this purpose, I will discuss the connection of these two scenes<sup>3</sup>.

The scholarship on comic elements in tragedy, dating from decades before “paracomedy” appears as a term, has unsurprisingly focused on Euripides’ later tragedies,<sup>4</sup> and occasionally on Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and Sophocles’ *Antigone*<sup>5</sup>. In any case, the scholarship on paratragedy is incomparably

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1. In the same line are KIRPATRICK - DUNN (2002) and JENDZA (2013).

2. Minor occasions that scholars have proposed are Pentheus and Dionysus’ crosstalking in their first encounter, Pentheus’ chasing a bull and a phantom by illusion, and Dionysus’ bending down the fir tree with Pentheus on top. I have reservations about them, especially for the second occasion which clearly echoes the *Ajax*.

3. Some of the ideas found here are also in MORWOOD (2016); I arrived at them independently, having written this paper in 2015. SEIDENSTICKER (1978), though fundamental on the topic, is now old and methodologically weak, not offering a close reading or comparing with passages from comedy.

4. KNOX (1970), BURNETT (1971), DUNN (1989), SEIDENSTICKER (1978) and (1982), MATTHIESSEN (1989-1990), SEGAL (1995) and GREGORY (1999-2000).

5. HERINGTON (1963); SOMMERSTEIN (2002); MCCARTHY (2008).

wider, elevating it to a constitutional element of comedy<sup>6</sup>. The same is not true with paracomedy, with critics being sceptical about the possibility of comicality in tragedies. A comparison of the two techniques is required, in order to remove such prejudices. Paratragedy in comedy can be either an explicit reference to a certain tragic poet, play, or passage (in the latter case, with citation or alteration), or an appropriation of general themes and tropes that are considered as belonging to the tragic style. Paracomedy in tragedy, on the other hand, resorts only to the second method, exploiting materials and motifs found in comedy, but without using explicit citations of, or direct quotations from, specific comedies. This is due neither to some kind of contempt on part of the “superior” genre, nor to some stylistic inappropriateness of the “inferior” genre, as some critics maintain<sup>7</sup>. It is because tragedy, in contrast to comedy, has a mythological / non-contemporary setting, and therefore it would just be a troublesome anachronism for a mythical character to speak of a modern comedian. What also obscures the identification and acceptance of paracomedy is the misunderstanding that something comic is necessarily something that causes laughter and, as such, has no place in tragedy. But, reversely, has anyone ever suggested that paratragedy in comedy is horrifying? Certainly not. To make it clear, just as in comedy we acknowledge that paratragedy is intended to be funny, we must also accept that paracomedy in tragedy is something facilitating the tragic effect; in both cases, the recipient-genre transcribes the counter-genre for its own purpose. Going further, I would say that as paratragedy is most funny, paracomedy in its finest versions is most tragic: it is a gruesome climax that characterises liminal moments (in terms of *rites de passage*) and borderline personalities (in psychiatric terms).

### Illusory Youthfulness

To call rejuvenation a comic theme would be arbitrary. For rejuvenation, whether as a metamorphosis to, or a semblance of, a young person, is a

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6. See RAU (1967), GOLDHILL (1991), SILK (1993), TAPLIN (1986) and (1996), MEDDA ET AL. (2006), DUTTA (2007).

7. “The conventions of the comic stage readily admit an admixture of seemingly extraneous elements like the tragic and the pathetic, whereas tragedy has its fabric dangerously stretched to admit the comic or the farcical.” STYAN (1968) 43.

common theme across literature and mythology. Already in Homer, we find both the concepts of actual and metaphorical rejuvenation of Odysseus<sup>8</sup>. In mythology, youth was deified as *Ἡβη*, who was serving the Olympians with *νέκταρ* and *ἀμβροσία* (immortality) and whom Hercules married and gained eternal youth<sup>9</sup>. What is comic, instead, is an illusory youthfulness, i.e. acting and/or talking like a young one, although the desired rejuvenation is unattained.

In the Tiresias-Cadmus scene, where the two men, filled with the bacchanal spirit and dressed with the relevant outfit, are ready to join the new god's worship (170 ff.), some critics acknowledge a Dionysiac miracle of rejuvenation<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, the elders display a youthful enthusiasm and once claim to have forgotten their age:

Κάδ. [...] ἐπιλελήσμεθ' ἡδέως  
                   **γέροντες** ὄντες.  
 Τειρ. ταῦτ' ἐμοὶ πάσχεις ἄρα·  
                   κἀγὼ γὰρ **ἡβῶ** κάπιχειρήσω χοροῖς. 190

But within the whole context, this statement clearly works as a self-consolation. For both of them know and repeatedly say they are old (175, 186, 189, 193, 204, 324, 365), Pentheus reminds them of that as well (252, 258), and so does the chorus (328). The more recurring motif in these lines is that of grey hair. Apart from this accumulation of *γέρων* vocabulary, occasionally emphasised with *paronomasia* (*πρέσβυς ὦν γεραιτέρω*, 175; *γέρων γέροντι*, 186; *γέρων γέροντα*, 193), there are also scenic motifs typical of old age<sup>11</sup>:

Τειρ. [...] ἀλλ' ἔπου μοι κισσίνου βάκτρου μέτα, 365  
                   πειρῶ δ' **ἀνορθοῦν** σῶμ' ἐμόν, κἀγὼ τὸ σόν·  
                   γέροντε δ' αἰσχρὸν δύο **πεσεῖν**· ἴτω δ' ὅμως,

Therefore, the old men are not truly rejuvenated but (consciously) throw themselves into regressive behaviour, admitting at the same time their inadequacy. Their behaviour is not a miraculous result of celebrating Dionysus but a prearranged necessity, in order to celebrate him:

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8. *Od.* 16.172-176, 23.153-163.

9. Hes. *Theog.* 950; *Hymn Hom.* 15.

10. MURRAY (1963<sup>3</sup>) 91-99, ROUX (1972) 303, STEIDLE (1968) 34.

11. Cf. *Ion* 738 ff.

Τειρ.	[...] ἃ τε <b>ξυνεθέμην</b> πρέσβυς ὦν γεραιτέρω, θύρσους ἀνάπτειν καὶ νεβρῶν δοράς ἔχειν στεφανοῦν τε κρᾶτα κισσίνοις βλαστήμασιν. .....	175
Κάδ.	<b>δεῖ γάρ</b> νιν ὄντα παῖδα θυγατρὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς [Διόνυσον ὃς πέφηνεν ἀνθρώποις θεὸς] <b>ὅσον καθ' ἡμᾶς δυνατόν</b> αὔξεσθαι μέγαν. .....	181
Τειρ.	[...] πολὺὰ ξυνωρίς, ἀλλ' ὅμως <b>χορευτέον</b>	324

Here exactly, in illusory youthfulness, lies the comic tone<sup>12</sup>. If they were rejuvenated, physically and/or emotionally, this would be consonant with their youthful actions and therefore, no comicality would emerge. But now, there is not just a contradiction between their *φαίνεσθαι* and *εἶναι*, but a contradiction within their *φαίνεσθαι* itself: their appearance and scenic action construct an inept ‘age-hybrid’ and the language emphasises this ironic paradox. For instance, in Cadmus’ utterance to Tiresias *γέρων γέροντα παιδαγωγῆσω σ’ ἐγώ* (193), the climax being constructed with the paronomasia *γέρων γέροντα* ends up with the oxymoron *παιδαγωγῆσω*. Given their consciousness of their old age, this line expresses self-irony, which is considered the highest form of irony<sup>13</sup>.

Pentheus characterises the sight of the two elders as a *θαῦμα* (and specifically as a *τόδ’ ἄλλο θαῦμα*, which is ironic)<sup>14</sup> causing or deserving *πολὺν γέλων* (248-250). Seidensticker argues that here Pentheus is an eyewitness who encourages the audience to laugh along with him; Gregory contradicts him on the basis of Pentheus’ unreliability in assessing Dionysus and concludes that “the audience is unlikely to interpret the scene as comic or humorous on his account”<sup>15</sup>. I agree that laughing here, within a long and ag-

12. DEICHGRABER (1935: 327), GRUBE (1935: 39f), KITTO (<sup>3</sup>1961: 375), WINNINGTON-INGRAM (1948: 41) and DODDS (1960: 192) advocate the comic reading; CONACHER (1967: 61), ROHDICH (1968: 144), STEIDLE (1968: 33-35), ROUX (1972: 301f) and LESKY (<sup>3</sup>1971: 451) object.

13. The Socratic irony of the Platonic dialogues derives from this comic origin (*Enc.Brit.*).

14. *θαῦμα* here should be translated as “wonder” rather than “miracle”, which would stand for a true rejuvenation.

15. GREGORY (1999-2000) 66-67. She ignores that Seidensticker had already an answer to her objection: “Pentheus of course could be wrong. If we had been presented with an unquestionably serious scene, we would dismiss his judgement as inade-

gressive monologue (215-262), is unlikely, but renouncing the comicality of the whole scene is arbitrary, even if we accept that “the presence of humour cannot be argued; it can only be felt”<sup>16</sup>.

The dramaturgic function of this emphasis on old age, beyond any paracomic intention, is to demarcate youth, which is ascribed to Dionysus par excellence; within this senescent atmosphere, to call him *δαίμων νέος* (256, 272) mostly means the *young* god, rather than *new* god. But who is also ascribed youth is Pentheus; yet the word used for him by Tiresias is *ῶ νεανία* (274), which is a euphemism for *μωρός*, emphasised by the exclamation. The rivalry with the god, even in terms of age, is vain. In the corresponding scene of Pentheus crossdressing, Dionysus will pronounce his victory like this:

Κάδμου θυγατέρες· τὸν νεανίαν ἄγω  
τόνδ' εἰς ἄγῶνα μέγαν, ὃ νικήσων δ' ἐγὼ 975

Euripides had employed the theme of illusory youthfulness in the case of Iolaos in the *Heraclidae* (630 ff.), achieving a highly comic effect, indeed higher than in the *Bacchae*, since Iolaos never admits the oddity of his behaviour. Even though he bemoans his old age in the beginning (633, 636), once he “gets stuck” with the idea to join the battle, he insistently takes pride in his combat effectiveness, in a clearly paracomic crosstalk with his interlocutor (679-92). But when it comes to executing his decision and wearing his armour, his age betrays him, and an even funnier crosstalk emerges (729-39)<sup>17</sup>. We notice verbal, scenic and thematic analogies with Tiresias and Cadmus' scene that might suggest a direct borrowing from the *Heraclidae*:

Ιόλ. καλῶς ἔλεξας· ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ πρόχειρ' ἔχων 736  
τεύχη κόμιζε, χειρὶ δ' ἔνθεος ὀξύην,  
λαῖόν τ' ἔπαιρε πῆχυν, εὐθύνων πόδα.  
Θερ. ἦ παιδαγωγεῖν γὰρ τὸν ὀπλίτην χρεών;

quote. It would tell us something about Pentheus, not about the effect of the two old men. On the other hand, in the light of what has been said about the stage action, the tone of the dialogue, and the function of the scene we have good reason to assume that Pentheus' laughter is the reaction the author intended to produce.” (1978: 315).

16. WINNINGTON-INGRAM (1948) 40 n. 1.

17. For the scene, see ZUNTZ (1963) 26-31; FALKNER (1989) 114-31 [= (1995) 179-192].

In both cases, illusory youthfulness is linked to wearing an improper outfit for the elderly, military or celebratory. *παιδαγωγεῖν* in the passage given stands exactly in the same point (during preparation for departure) and with the same function (sarcasm) as *παιδαγωγήσω* in *Bacch.* 193 and the scenic direction *ἔπαιρε πῆχυν* is similar to *ἀλλ' ἐμῆς ἔχον χερός* in *Bacch.* 197. Undeniably, the relevant scene in the *Bacchae* is less comic (the elders have consciousness of their incapability, crosstalk is confined in 191-9, the only aside seems to be 359b), in order not to overshadow the central paracommic scene, Pentheus' transvestism.

To establish the paracommic quality of scenes of illusory youthfulness in tragedy requires us to refer to comedy<sup>18</sup>. In the *Clouds*, after Pheidippides' refusal to attend Socrates' school, his father Strepsiades decides to become a student himself. It is exactly the same motif (the paradox of educating an old man) that we found both in the *Bacch.* and the *Heracl.*

Στρ. Πῶς οὖν γέρον ὦν καπιλήσιμων καὶ βραδὺς  
λόγων ἀκριβῶν σκινδαλάμους μαθήσομαι; 130

Another discussed motif of illusory youthfulness, wearing improper attire, occurs in the *Wasps*: Bdelycleon dresses up his father Philocleon with fancy clothes, to prepare him for parties, and instructs him how to act, walk, and speak (1121-72). Philocleon adopts his son's plan and throws himself into feast and lust, claiming to have been literally rejuvenated (*νέος γάρ εἰμι*, 1355). But self-sarcastically, he betrays himself when, referring to his penis, he calls it *σαπρὸν σχοινίον* (1344), like with Tiresias and Cadmus' confession of physical inability. Moreover, Philocleon's bursting enthusiasm is of a bacchanalian quality similar to theirs:

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18. Here, again, a distinction between rejuvenation and illusory youthfulness is necessary. The triumph of many Aristophanic heroes is presented as a metaphorical rejuvenation of themselves and of Athens, a passing to a new era. As long as the poet's intention was to make these heroes — and the ideas represented by them — likeable, their rejuvenation had to be protected from mockery. Thus, Trygaeus is not portrayed as a dotard lecher (illusory youthfulness), but a keen lover of the young Opora (rejuvenation). Illusory youthfulness is proper for characters who are intended to be ridiculed. For old age in comedy, see CORNFORD (1914) 87-94, BYL (1977), HUBBARD (1989), HANDLEY (1993), POLYAKOV (2013).

Ξανθ. νῆ τὸν Διόνυσον ἄπορά γ' ἡμῖν πράγματα  
 δαίμων τις ἐσκεκύκληκεν ἐς τὴν οἰκίαν. 1475  
 ὁ γὰρ γέγων ὥς ἔπιε διὰ πολλοῦ χρόνου  
 ἤκουσέ τ' αὐλοῦ, περιχαρὴς τῷ πράγματι  
 ὄρχούμενος τῆς νυκτός οὐδὲν παύεται

A persistent treatment of old age and illusory youthfulness, now not in random scenes but across the play and with central importance, is *Lysistrata*. The chorus of old men comes combatively to expel with fire the squatters on the Acropolis, but they suffer in ascending the Propylaea and the torches are too heavy to carry (254-5, 286-295). The elders' tribulation of ascending is also found in the *Bacchae* (εἰς ὄρος περάσομεν, 191) and is overpowered exactly with the same self-encouragement:

ἀλλ' ὅμως βαδιστέον (*Lys.* 292)

ἀλλ' ὅμως χορευτέον (*Bacch.* 324)



The tribulation of ascending in comedy; McDaniel Painter, "Cheiron Vase", London 1849.6–20.13 (F 151). Apulian bell-krater early fourth century BC  
 © Trustees of the British Museum.

## Transvestism

Gender alteration and transvestism is not exclusive to comedy. In Homer the instances of Athena being transformed to a man are plenty. In the pseudo-Hesiodic *Melampodia* there was the story of Tiresias being transformed into a woman by Hera, as a punishment for killing two snakes<sup>19</sup>. In Statius' *Achilleid*, whose source was probably Euripides' lost play *Σκύριοι*, Thetis dresses up her son Achilles as a maiden, in order to hide him in Lycomedes' court and not allow him to die at Troy<sup>20</sup>. The most famous case of transvestism in mythology is Hercules', when he was Omphale's captive<sup>21</sup>. However, such instances are rare and marginal: the former two are transfigurations (thus the magic/divine element overcomes the sex/gender itself) and the latter two have been interpolated or stretched out by Roman sources. As for ritual transvestism, it was certainly a fact in Greek cult (we have firm evidence of boys crossdressing at least for the Athenian *Oschophoria*)<sup>22</sup>, but as such it should remain hidden. It is comedy that openly and insistently embraced this theme/trope and stabilised it as a generic convention; apart from any "inherent" comicality of transvestism, its appropriateness lies in the metadramatic intention of comedy. Apart from being a funny spectacle, transvestism is a comment on the theatrical practice of males acting female roles. Therefore, the colourful crossdressing scene in the *Bacchae*, apart from its association with ritual, inevitably echoes comedy<sup>23</sup>; and this is why this tragedy is so metadramatic<sup>24</sup>.

Pentheus' transvestism under the directions of the foreigner, announced in 810-846 and applied in 912-976, is Dionysus' resentful revenge for the King's previous questioning of his masculinity:

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19. fr. 275 Merkelbach-West (with thanks to the reviewer who pointed this out); Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7.

20. HESLING (2005) 193-198.

21. LORAUX (1990) 35-36, ALONSO (1996) 103-20, KAMPEN (1996) 233-246 and CYRINO (1998) 214. The cross-dressing is an invention of Roman love poets; indicatively, Ov. *Her* 9.53-118.

22. PARKE (1977) 77, SIMON (1983) 89f, CALAME (1996) 128f, 143-8 and WALDNER (2000) 102-134.

23. MUECKE (1982: 32) views the scene as following the conventions of tragedy, not comedy.

24. See FOLEY (1980).



- Πενθ. [...] ἀτὰρ τὸ μὲν σῶμ' οὐκ ἄμορφος εἶ, ξένε,  
 ὥς ἐς γυναῖκας, ἐφ' ὅπερ ἐς Θήβας πάρει·  
 πλόκαμός τε γάρ σου ταναός, οὐ πάλης ὕπο, 455  
 γένυν παρ' αὐτὴν κεχυμένος, πόθου πλέως·  
 λευκὴν δὲ χροιάν ἐκ παρασκευῆς ἔχεις,  
 οὐχ ἡλίου βολαῖσιν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ σκιᾶς,  
 τὴν Ἀφροδίτην καλλονῇ θηρώμενος.  
 .....
- Πενθ. ὥς θρασὺς ὁ βάκχος κοῦκ ἀγύμναστος λόγων.  
 Διόν. εἴφ' ὃ τι παθεῖν δεῖ· τί με τὸ δεινὸν ἐργάσῃ;  
 Πενθ. πρῶτον μὲν ἀβρὸν βόστρυχον τεμῶ σέθεν. 493  
 Διόν. ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος· τῷ θεῷ δ' αὐτὸν τρέφω.

In this first encounter of the rivals, Pentheus started talking as an *iron* (note the multiple *litotes*), but was quickly revealed as a violent *alazon* (τεμῶ) and the cut πλόκαμος became his trophy; and the ironic peak of his audacity was that he called Dionysus a θρασὺς (another word for *alazon*)<sup>25</sup>. Now Dionysus, paying him back “in the same coin”, becomes a vindictive *alazon* by being an *iron*:

- Διόν. χρήζω δέ νιν γέλωτα Θηβαίοις ὀφλεῖν  
 γυναικόμορφον ἀγόμενον δι' ἄστεως 855  
 ἐκ τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν πρίν, αἵσι δεινὸς ἦν.

The γέλωτα is “an explicit hint with respect to the intended effect of the scene”<sup>26</sup>, a *deixis* of paracomedie<sup>27</sup>. The status of being at the boundaries of *iron* and *alazon*, a dipole which applies both to Pentheus and Dionysus, is characteristic of the “comic heroes”<sup>28</sup>.

Moving to the dressing scene itself, Pentheus' transvestism has so many striking similarities with Kedestes' in the *Thesmophoriazousae* (204-268), that it

25. δοκεῖ δὲ καὶ ἀλαζὼν εἶναι ὁ θρασὺς (Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1115b. 29). For Aristotle's definitions of *iron* and *alazon*, c.f. *Eth.Nic.* 1108a 19-22, 1127a 13-32, 1127b 9-32.

26. SEIDENSTICKER (1978) 317.

27. DODDS (*ad loc.*) maintains that Dionysus' motive here, to humiliate Pentheus in public, is arbitrary, for it is inconsistent with 841 (ὁδοὺς ἐρήμους ἵμεν), and that the disguise was just a ritual necessity. But 841 could well be a fake reassurance by Dionysus to persuade his rival who, after having been instilled with ἐλαφρὰ λύσσα (851), would not notice very much.

28. CORNFORD (1914) 132-171; WHITMAN (1964) 281-287; MCLEISH (1980) 53ff; BALDWIN (1997) 120-237; SILK (1990) 163ff.

can fairly be argued that Euripides directly drew on Aristophanes, in an ostentatiously paracomical way<sup>29</sup>. The temporal proximity of the two plays (*Thesm.* 411 – *Bacch.* probably written in 406/407)<sup>30</sup> strengthens this hypothesis. Firstly, the purpose of the disguise of the two men is the same: to spy on a secret and hostile gathering of women, within a religious ritual, by becoming a member of their group.

Eὐρ.	ἐκκλησιάσονται ἐν ταῖς <u>γυναιξί</u> καὶ δέη	90
	λέξονθ' ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.	91
Eὐρ.	<u>λάθρα</u> στολήν <u>γυναικός</u> ἡμφιεσμένον.	92
Eὐρ.	ἐὰν γὰρ <u>ἐγκαθεζόμενος</u> λάθρα	184
	ἐν ταῖς <u>γυναιξίν</u> , ὡς <u>δοκῶν</u> εἶναι γυνή,	185 <i>Thesm.</i>
	.....	
Διόν.	βούλη σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι <u>συγκαθημένας</u> <u>ιδεῖν</u> ;	811
Πενθ.	τί δὴ τόδ'; ἐς <u>γυναικας</u> ἐξ ἀνδρὸς τελῶ;	822
Διόν.	μή σε κτάνωσιν, ἦν ἀνὴρ <u>ὀφθῆς</u> ἐκεῖ.	823
Πενθ.	ὀρθῶς· μολεῖν χορὴ πρῶτον εἰς <u>κατασκοπήν</u> .	838
Διόν.	μητρὸς τε τῆς σῆς καὶ λόχου <u>κατάσκοπος</u> ·	916
Διόν.	<u>κρύψῃ</u> σὺ <u>κρύψιν</u> ἦν σε <u>κρυφθῆναι</u> χρεών,	955
	ἐλθόντα δόλιον μαινάδων <u>κατάσκοπον</u> .	<i>Bacch.</i>

The lexical correspondences are telling: *ἐγκαθεζόμενος* – *συγκαθημένας*; *λάθρα* – *κρύψῃ*, *κρύψιν*, *κρυφθῆναι*; *δοκῶν* – *ιδεῖν*, *ὀφθῆς*, *κατασκοπήν*; *γυναικός*, *γυναιξίν*, *γυνή* – *γυναικας*.

A second common point is the progress of these makeovers. In Kedestes' case, the transformation starts with shaving and waxing (215-48), then moves to the dressing up (249-66), and ends up with instructions on speaking like a woman (267-8). In Pentheus' case, hair is again the first concern (928-33), fixing the clothes comes second (934-8) and instructions follow on how to walk and hold the *θύρσος* like a proper bacchant (940-4). Moreover, the dressing itself is similar. Kedestes' costume consists of a *κροκωτός* (tunic), a *στροφίον* (belt), a *κεκρύφαλος* and a *μίτρα* for the head, an *ἔγκυκλον* (cloak), and female *ὑποδήματα* (253-262). Correspondingly, Pentheus wears *βυσσίνους πέπλους ποδήρεις*, *ζῶναι*, *ἐπὶ κάρᾳ μίτρα*, and *νεβροῦ στικτὸν δέρας* as a cloak (821 ff.); female shoes are not mentioned, but the instruc-

29. Not seeing the parallelisms, DODDS (1960: 192) cited the scene as opposite to Pentheus' crossdressing.

30. "written by 407" according to WEBSTER (1967) 238, 257.

tions by Dionysus on how to step like a maenad are an equivalent (943). The following detail is extremely similar:

Μνησ.	[...] αἶρε νῦν <b>στρόφιον</b> .	255
Εὐρ.	ἰδοῦ.	
Μνησ.	ἴθι νυν κατάστειλόν με τὰ <b>περὶ τῷ σκέλει</b> .	<i>Thesm.</i>
	.....	
Διόν.	ζῶναί τέ σοι χαλῶσι κοῦχ ἑξῆς <b>πέπλων</b> <b>στολίδες ὑπὸ σφυροῖσι τείνουσιν σέθεν</b> . κάμοι δοκοῦσι <b>παρὰ γε δεξιὸν πόδα</b> τάνθενδε δ' ὀρθῶς παρὰ τένοντ' ἔχει <b>πέπλος</b> .	935 <i>Bacch.</i>

The main differences are that Pentheus is also given *θύρσον γε χειρὶ* (835) and that instead of a kerchief he has *κόμην ταναόν* (831) with a *πλόκαμος* (928) attached. And the more the Aristophanic intertext is recognised, the more evident this discrepancy is. Indeed, these are the two most significant dressing elements. The *πλόκαμος* is the symbol of femininity which was jeeringly and forcibly taken from Dionysus (454, 493-4) and is now being vengefully attached by him to Pentheus. The *θύρσος* is the symbol and instrument of the bacchic ritual, one of the most repeated words in the tragedy (22 times) and, most importantly, the weapon on which Pentheus' head will be pegged. These two paraphernalia are the scenic expression of Pentheus' tragic fate, and their placement in a paracomic context stretches out their gruesome symbolism: "his bacchic dress will not be a dancing costume, but his shroud"<sup>31</sup>.

However, the core of the paracomedie does not lie in the transvestism itself, but in Pentheus' attitude towards it. Listening to the stranger's proposal to disguise him, he alternately expresses refusal (822, 828, 836) and withdrawal (824, 830, 838), until he ultimately and unreservedly submits, just like Kedestes:

Μνησ.	ἀλλὰ πρᾶττ', εἴ σοι δοκεῖ. ἢ μὴ' πιδούν' ἐμαυτὸν ὥφελόν ποτε.	<i>Thesm.</i> 216-7
	.....	
Πενθ.	ἰδοῦ, σὺ κόσμει· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνακείμεσθα δῆ	<i>Bacch.</i> 934

31. SEIDENSTICKER (1978) 318. For this interpretation, it is noteworthy that the *βύσσος* linen was known as an Egyptian mummy-wrapping material (Hdt. 2.86.6).

Just like Kedestes, Pentheus progressively espouses his role so as to internalize his acquired femininity. From a compulsory means for spying, cross-dressing has become an enjoyable end in itself for him. From now on he is not like a woman — he *is* a woman, coquettishly primping his outfit:

Μνησ.	τί οὖν λάβω; [...] νῆ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην ἡδύ γ' ὄζει ποσθίου. [...] ἄρ' ἀρμόσει μοι; [...] ἄρ' ἀρμόσει μοι;	Thesm. 252-63 sel.
Πενθ.	τί φαίνομαι δῆτ'; οὐχὶ τὴν Ἰουῦς στάσιν ἢ τὴν Ἀγαύης ἐστάναι, μητρὸς γ' ἐμῆς; [...] ἰδοῦ, σὺ κόσμει· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνακείμεσθα δῆ.	Bacch. 925-934 sel.

It is now interesting to turn to the *Frogs*, to see how the theme of transvestism is reused. And I suggest that it is reused filtered through the *Bacchae*; in that case, we have a vigorous, bi-directional dialogue, where the paracomic device becomes paratragic (*Thesm.* > *Bacch.* > *Frogs*). Even though a historically attested relation of the two plays is unavailable, the parodos of the *Frogs* emblematically suggests a direct dialogue with the Euripidean tragedy, through its striking verbal, stylistic and pictorial similarities<sup>32</sup>. As Dover puts it, the *Bacchae* “was not produced until after the poet’s [Euripides’] death; how long after, we do not know. Conceivably, on the same occasion as *Frogs*, or two months later, at the City Dionysia; [...] If *Bacchae* was produced in 405, Aristophanes and many other people will have known in advance what it was about; [...] If it was not produced until a later year, it is still possible that a text of it arrived in Athens in the course of 406. Comic parody of a text not yet performed is unlikely, given the small size of the reading public, and if the occurrence in *Frogs* of certain words and phrases found also in *Bacchae* is anything other than coincidence, they must be allusions for connoisseurs rather than reminders to the audience as a whole”<sup>33</sup>.

The theme of disguise in both plays is linked with those of humiliation, tribulation, and finally, *σπαραγμός*: the one who dresses up is the one who suffers. In this sense, Dionysus of the *Frogs* is a comic alter-ego of Pentheus of the *Bacchae* — as if Aristophanes wanted to take revenge on behalf of Pentheus. Both characters have to disguise themselves in order to execute their

32. See CANTARELLA (1974) 292-301; CORBATO (1990); SAETTA COTTONE (2011).

33. DOVER (1993) 37-38. More directly but without evidence, C. Segal maintains that the *Bacchae*’ first official performance in Athens was in 405 B.C. (GIBBONS - SEGAL 2001: 6).

plan, which in both cases is the transition to a spooky and hostile place (Cithaeron – underworld). The Dionysus of the *Frogs* has a reverse transvestism: inherently feminine, he is awkwardly wearing a manly Herculean outfit. And just as the cross-dressed Pentheus is humiliated by the stranger (remember the *γέλωτα* in 845), so is he, by Hercules:

ἀλλ' οὐχ οἷός τ' εἶμ' ἀποσοβῆσαι τὸν γέλων 45  
 ὄρων λεοντῆν ἐπὶ κροκωτῷ κειμένην.  
 τίς ὁ νοῦς; τί κόθορνος καὶ ῥόπαλον ξυνηλθέτην;  
 ποῖ γῆς ἀπεδήμεις;

The chiasmus (*λεοντῆν, κροκωτῷ, κόθορνος, ῥόπαλον*) underlines the comic paradox of this mixture<sup>34</sup>. In both cases, the one who humiliates is the “proper wearer” of the relevant costume (Dionysus of the Bacchic costume and Hercules of the *λεοντῆ*), who as an expert laughs at his clumsy imitator. In his transgender disguise, *Frogs*' Dionysus undergoes a series of comic tribulations, leading to a comic *σπαραγμός*: virtual suicides (117-135), rowing with difficulty across the lake of death (203-5), hiding from the *Ἐμπούσα* (285-308), soiling himself at Aeacus' threats (479-75):

Αἰακός [...] τοῖα Στυγός σε μελανοκάρδιος πέτρα 470  
 Ἀχερόντιός τε σκόπελος αἵματοσταγῆς  
 φρουροῦσι, Κωκυτοῦ τε περὶδρομοὶ κύνες,  
 ἔχιδνά θ' ἑκατογκέφαλος, ἢ τὰ σπλάγχνα σου  
**διασπαράξει**, πλευμόνων τ' ἀνθάψεται  
 Ταρτησία μύραινα τὼ νεφρῶ δέ σου 475  
 αὐτοῖσιν ἐντέροισιν ἡματωμένῳ  
**διασπᾶσονται** Γοργόνες Τειθράσιαι,  
 ἐφ' ἃς ἐγὼ δρομαῖον ὀρμήσω πόδα.

This could fairly be seen as a comic / paratragic rewriting of Pentheus' fate. And even if someone does not accept Dover's and others' conjecture about Aristophanes and the Athenians' familiarity with the *Bacchae* in 406/5,

34. According to the scholia, ἐκπλήττεται δὲ ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ὄρων τὴν ἄτοπον ταύτην σκευήν, καὶ ὅτι τὰ ἄμικτα ἔμειξεν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ κροκωτὸς καὶ ὁ κόθορνος γυναικεῖα ἐστίν, ἢ δὲ λεοντῆ καὶ τὸ ῥόπαλον ἀνδρῶα. STANFORD (1958: 75) denies transgender implications in the costume. LADA-RICHARDS (1999: 21-32) on the other hand, and more correctly, acknowledges a complex of counter-meanings, among which is the opposition male-female.

even if influences are not involved, the analogies with the *Frogs* are striking and would suffice to establish this tragedy as paracommic.

### Connection

Having analysed the two paracommic themes / scenes of the *Bacchae* separately, it has already been suggested that they are linked to each other, but a concentrated record of similarities would be illuminating. (a) Apart from being paracommic, both scenes are metadramatic; roles are distributed, costumes are worn and scenic directions are assigned, sometimes using technical terms:

Καδ.	... ἦκω δ' ἔτοιμος τήνδ' ἔχων <b>σκευὴν</b> θεοῦ·	180
Διόν.	... Πενθέα...	
	... <b>σκευὴν</b> γυναικὸς μαινάδος βάκχης ἔχων,	913-5

More accurately, it is largely this metadramatic aspect that makes these scenes paracommic, or *vice versa*. For example, both Cadmus' and Pentheus' paracommic entrances (emerging strangely from a building is a central motif in Aristophanic stagecraft) are entrances of actors who play old men who, like actors, pretend the young bacchants<sup>35</sup>.

Τειρ.	τίς ἐν πύλαισι; Κάδμον ἐκκάλει δόμων	170
Διόν.	ἔξιθι πάροιθε δωμαίων, ὄφθητί μοι,	514

(b) Both scenes contain a maenadic disguise entailing contradictory identities (old *vs* young, male *vs* female), signifying the transition (liminal) phase of the bacchanalian *rite de passage*. (c) Pentheus is scornfully called *νεανίας* in both cases (247, 974), firstly for contemning the ritual and later for falling into the trap to follow. (d) The humiliation of the improperly dressed men, apart from any paracommic layer, is explicitly dictated to the audience in both scenes: *γέλων* (250), *γέλωτα* (854). (e) The excuse with which Tiresias and Cadmus, on the one hand, and Pentheus, on the other, use to encourage

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35. See SEGAL (1997) 215-271.

themselves in their improper behaviour (illusory youthfulness – transvestism) is exactly the same:

Καδ. δεῖ γάρ (181) Τειρ. ἀλλ' ὅμως χορευτέον (324) Πενθ. μολεῖν χορῇ (838)

If all these explain *how* the scenes are connected, it logically emerges *why* they are connected. The reason for the existence of the first one is to prepare the latter, creating a circle of bitter revenge: Pentheus, the one who humiliated Dionysus and his supporters, is now the one being humiliated and indeed, in the same exactly manner. The abuser now becomes the victim.

For the functionality of this concept, the two scenes are not equivalent, though similar. Aptly but without clarifying its purpose, Seidensticker points that “in the earlier scene towards the beginning of the drama, both components [the tragic and the comic] are less intense than at its climax, immediately before the horrible death of Pentheus”<sup>36</sup>. Apart from the necessity of a dramatic climax towards the end, Pentheus’ scene *has to* be more tragic and (para)comic because *he* is the ὑβριστής θεομάχος; Tiresias and Cadmus are faithful, so cannot be placed in the same level with Pentheus, otherwise the reverence for the god would be undermined. Thus, beyond the evident similarities of the scenes, there are some differences that demarcate the two cases. As regards paracomedy, this demarcation emerges from the fact that Tiresias and Cadmus are not rejuvenated and their illusory youthfulness is conscious (so their enthusiasm is moderated). Pentheus’ queerness, on the other hand, is unconscious: he does become a woman and a maenad. The latter scene is more paracomical because it needs to be more tragic.

\* \* \*

As a play engaging with Dionysus, the god of both tragedy and comedy, the *Bacchae* has inevitably an impressive proportion of paracomedy (just like the *Frogs* of paratragedy). Paratragedy is studied incomparably more than paracomedy, partially due to misconceptions about the latter, such as comicality destroying the tragic effect, or that to characterise something as comic, it must be hilarious. Methodologically, to base oneself on our (subjective) humour in order to identify paracomedy, is equally arbitrary. In order to establish the paracomical quality of the scenes of illusory youthfulness and

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36. SEIDENSTICKER (1978) 319.

transvestism in the *Bacchae*, I drew on relevant passages from Aristophanes' plays. Whether they constitute analogies or influences (at least for the *Thesmophoriazusae* the latter is tenable) is a minor issue, for both paracomedy and paratragedy transcribe themes and tropes of their sister-genre, without necessarily parodying specific poets, plays, or lines. And through the connection of the two scenes, the *Bacchae* manages to coordinate the comic element with its tragic purpose so perfectly, that paracomedy becomes gruesome.

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Κατ'αναλογία προς την «παρατραγωδία», ο όρος «παρακωμωδία», που εισήχθη το 1993, καθιερώθηκε ως δηλωτικός της εκμετάλλευσης ορισμένων κωμικών θεμάτων από την τραγωδία. Η παρατραγωδία μελετάται ασύγκριτα περισσότερο από ότι η παρακωμωδία εξαιτίας, ως ένα βαθμό, ορισμένων προκαταλήψεων αναφορικά με την δεύτερη (όπως ότι η κωμικότητα διαρρηγνύει το τραγικό αποτέλεσμα ή ότι, για να χαρακτηρίσουμε κάτι ως κωμικό, πρέπει να είναι και ξεκαρδιστικό). Στο παρόν άρθρο αναλύονται οι κύριες εκφάνσεις παρακωμωδίας στις *Βάκχες* του Ευριπίδη, ήτοι οι σκηνές/θέματα της ιδεατής επιστροφής στη νεότητα και της παρενδυσίας. Για να αποδείξω την ιδιότητά τους ως παρακωμικών, καταφεύγω σε προγενέστερες και μεταγενέστερες Αριστοφανικές κωμωδίες, εντοπίζοντας αναλογίες και/ή επιδράσεις. Εν συνεχεία,

ιδιαίτερη έμφαση δίνεται στην κατανόηση του τρόπου με τον οποίο το προσληφθέν κωμικό υλικό υπηρετεί την τραγικότητα· για το σκοπό αυτό, συζητώ τη σύνδεση των δύο παρακωμικών σκηνών. Όπως ακριβώς αναγνωρίζουμε ότι η παρατραγωδία στην κωμωδία έχει χιουμοριστικό σκοπό, πρέπει επίσης να δεχθούμε ότι η παρακωμωδία στην τραγωδία είναι κάτι που εξυπηρετεί την τραγικότητα. Και στις δύο περιπτώσεις δηλαδή, το λογοτεχνικό είδος-αποδέκτης μεταγράφει το αδελφό είδος για τους δικούς του σκοπούς. Υποστηρίζω πως, όπως η παρατραγωδία είναι εξαιρετικά αστεία, έτσι και η παρακωμωδία στις πιο δουλευμένες εκδοχές της είναι εξαιρετικά τραγική: είναι η φρικτή κλιμάκωση που χαρακτηρίζει τις οριακές καταστάσεις και τις οριακές προσωπικότητες.

#### ABSTRACT

By analogy with “paratragedy”, the term “paracomedy”, introduced in 1993, was established to denote the appropriation of specific comic themes in tragedy. Paratragedy is studied incomparably more than paracomedy, partially due to misconceptions about the latter, such as that comicality destroys the tragic effect, or that to characterise something as comic, it must be hilarious. In the present paper, I discuss the basic manifestations of paracomedy in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, namely the themes/scenes of illusory youthfulness and transvestism. To establish their status as paracomical, I draw on earlier and later Aristophanic comedies, locating analogies and/or influences. Secondly, a special emphasis is placed on understanding how the received comic material supports the tragic effect; for this purpose, I discuss the connection of these two scenes. Just as in comedy we acknowledge that paratragedy is intended to be funny, we must also accept that paracomedy in tragedy is something facilitating the tragic effect; in both cases, the recipient-genre transcribes the counter-genre for its own purpose. I argue that as paratragedy is most funny, paracomedy in its finest versions is most tragic: it is a gruesome climax that characterises liminal moments (in terms of *rites de passage*) and borderline personalities (in psychiatric terms).