Bearing Razors and Swords: Paracomedy in Euripides’ 

Orestes

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Bearing Razors and Swords: Paracomedy in Euripides’ Orestes

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Abstract. In this article, I trace a nuanced interchange between Euripides’ Helen, Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae, and Euripides’ Orestes that contains a previously overlooked example of Aristophanic paratragedy and Euripides’ paracomic response. I argue that the escape plot from Helen, in which Menelaus and Helen flee with “sword-bearing” men (ξιφηφόρος), was co-opted in Thesmophoriazusae, when Aristophanes staged Euripides escaping with a man described as “being a razor-bearer” (ξυροφορέω). Furthermore, I suggest that Euripides re-appropriates this parody by escalating the quantity of sword-bearing men in Orestes, suggesting a dynamic poetic rivalry between Aristophanes and Euripides. Additionally, I delineate a methodology for evaluating instances of paracomedy.

Paratragedy, comedy’s appropriation of lines, scenes, and dramaturgy from tragedy, constitutes a source of the genre’s authority (Foley 1988; Platter 2007), a source of the genre’s identity as a literary underdog in comparison to tragedy (Rosen 2005), and a source of its humor either through subverting or ridiculing tragedy (Silk 1993; Robson 2009, 108–13) or through audience detection and identification of quotations (Wright 2012, 145–50). The converse relationship between Aristophanes and Euripides is marked by a poetic rivalry that becomes clear in the number of sword-bearing men that escape with Euripides. I suggest that Euripides re-appropriates this parody by escalating the quantity of sword-bearing men in Orestes, suggesting a dynamic poetic rivalry between Aristophanes and Euripides. Additionally, I delineate a methodology for evaluating instances of paracomedy.

1 Rau 1967 marks the beginning of serious investigation into paratragedy by analyzing numerous comic scenes that are modeled on tragic ones and providing a database, with hundreds of examples, of tragic lines that Aristophanes parodies. Aristophanic paratragedy is often explicit, bringing tragedians onstage in his comedies (i.e., Agathon at Thesm. 95–265; Aeschylus and Euripides at Ran. 830–1533; Euripides alone at Aeh. 394–488 and throughout Thesm.), citing tragedies (i.e., Euripides’ Palamedes at Thesm. 770 and 848; Euripides’ Helen at Thesm. 850; and Euripides’ Andromeda at Thesm. 1012), or naming tragic characters (i.e., Oineus, Phoenix, Philoctetes, Bellerophon, Thyestes, and Ino at Aeh. 418–34). At other times, paratragedy targets a general tragic mode, as at Nub. 1452–62, on which see Silk 2000, 352–56; Zimmermann 2006, 327–35. While paratragedy was originally viewed as primarily Aristophanic, scholars have subsequently demonstrated that paratragedy occurs in other comic playwrights as well. Miles 2009, 17–117, offers an overview of non-Aristophanic paracomedy with a strong focus on comic fragments. Bakola 2010, 118–79, describes Cratinus’ interactions with tragedy, and Telò 2007, 106–21, detects
tragedy and comedy, paracomedy, in which tragedy adopts elements drawn from comedy, has not been equally established as a productive historical phenomenon. By an “element drawn from comedy,” I mean a particular word, line, manner of expression, motif, theme, character type, scene, plot, pattern, staging, costuming, or delivery that specifically belongs to comedy. Most scholars of drama entirely ignore paracomedy or simply note its absence, as when Rosen mentions the “strangely unidirectional” literary rivalry between comedy and tragedy (2005, 264), or Pucci notes the “strange and upsetting asymmetrical relation between tragedy and comedy” since “comedy mocks and parodies tragedy, but tragedy can never respond” (2007, 121, n. 47).

Other scholars treat paracomedy only as a hypothetical possibility. Mastronarde writes, “the more delicate question is whether the influence and rivalry operated in the opposite direction, with tragic poets taking their cue from comedy,” concluding that “there is still ample room for disagreement among scholars” and that “Euripides is a precursor in respect to the relevant points of comparison [sc. the Western tradition of a comic genre] and not a borrower from a contemporary comic tradition” (2010, 58). In a recent volume, Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres, which discusses influences within and across dramatic genres, Silk writes: “it makes sense to discuss, for example, Aeschylus’ influence on Euripides, or epic influence on tragedy or tragic influence on Aristophanes’ Clouds, or the question of possible comic influence on tragedy, or Menandrian New Comedy as a convergence of Old Comedy and Euripides’ ‘romantic melodrama’” (2013, 30). Whereas the other options are presented as
certainties, the idea of comic influence on tragedy is raised as a theoretical possibility through Silk’s use of the words “the question of possible comic influence on tragedy [my emphasis].” Even though Silk goes on to suggest that “the kind of example one might choose to argue for specific influence from κωμῳδία would be Pentheus’ cross-dressing at Bacchae 913–44, in comparison with Aristoph. Thesm. 213–68,” he describes this in hypothetical terms, concluding that the jury is still out on the matter (2013, 32, n. 62). In the same volume, Wright adds, “Whether the genres [sc. of tragedy and comedy] are interdependent or whether we should talk in terms of a one-way process (of comedy’s dependence on tragedy) is a somewhat separate problem” (2013, 210, n. 22). Such views run contrary to the increasing number of arguments for paracomedy.4

In this article, I will trace a nuanced interchange between Euripides’ Helen (412 B.C.E.) Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae (411 B.C.E.) and Euripides’ Orestes (408 B.C.E.) that contains a previously overlooked example of Aristophanic paratragedy and Euripides’ paracomical response. I will argue that the escape plot from Helen, in which Menelaus and Helen flee with the assistance of men described as “sword-bearing” (ξιφηφόρος), was co-opted (and inverted) in Thesmophoriazusae, when Aristophanes staged Euripides escaping with the assistance of a man described with the verb “be a razor-bearer” (ξυροφορέω). Furthermore, I will suggest that Euripides re-appropriates the parody from Thesmophoriazusae by escalating the quantity of sword-bearing men in Orestes, and that the metapoetic terms with which Euripides signals his response reveal a dynamic poetic rivalry between Aristophanes and Euripides. Additionally, I will delineate a methodology for scholars to use in evaluating potential instances of paracomedy.

The crux of my argument lies in a joke that Aristophanes makes in Thesmophoriazusae. The character Euripides is in trouble, as the women at the Thesmophoria have decided that Euripides should die due to the maltreatment of women in his plays. After Euripides and his Kinsman fail to convince the effeminate playwright Agathon to infiltrate the woman’s festival, the hyper-masculine Kinsman is sent instead, and in order for the Kinsman to pass as a woman, Euripides needs to shave him, asking (Thesm. 218–20):5

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5Translation from Henderson 2000.
I propose that the parody lies in the *hapax legomenon* ξυροφορέω, and that the word has a meaning different from standard translations, which tend to render it along the lines of “you have razors.” The two elements that comprise the verb ξυροφορέω (ξυρόν “razor” and φέρω “bear”) can be productively compounded to create an ο-grade denominative adjective ξυροφόρος “razor-bearing,” which in turn can be used as a substantive noun, meaning “a razor-bearing man.” Along with any nominalization comes the process of typicalization, which Willi describes as the generalization that happens when, for example, a verb that possesses person, number, tense, voice, mood, and aspect loses some or all of these specifications in the process of becoming a noun (2003, 121). Because of this typicalization, the verb ξυροφορέω denotes the quality of typically or habitually bearing razors and is not the equivalent of ξυρόν φέρω (“I carry a razor”) but rather ξυροφόρος εἰμί (“I am a razor-bearer”).

I suggest that Aristophanes coined the typicalized word ξυροφορεῖς for a specific effect, especially considering that he could have used the metrically correct ξυρόν έχεις if he desired to mean “you have a razor” without any implication on his razor-bearing habits in general. On one level, the audience may have found it funny when the character Euripides speaks in ostentatious tragic compounds. I submit, however, that the parody expressed by ξυροφορέω goes beyond a general paratragic ambiance; rather, I suggest that Aristophanes parodied a specific Euripidean word, ξιφηφόρος (“sword-bearing”). The word ξιφηφόρος appears only in tragedy, once in Aeschylus and seven times in Euripides. There are no other attestations from the fifth century B.C.E., although the word does reappear in later authors and commentators, who most likely based their usage on the tragedians.7

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The earliest post-fifth-century B.C.E. attestations of ξιφηφόρος appear in fourth-century B.C.E. comic poet Antiphanes fr. 217.19, where it modifies the hands (χέριν) of a squid, and in the Hellenistic poet Lycophron’s Alexandra 153, where it is an obscure cult epithet of Demeter. The related verb ξιφηφορέω is late, with the earliest attestation in Philo *On the Unchangeableness of God* 60, dating to the first century C.E.
This connection of ξυροφορεῖς and ξιφηφόρος is a prototypical example of how puns and parodies work in comedy. According to an ancient view expressed in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a tenth-century manuscript which analyzes comedy in a manner following Aristotle’s *Poetics*, a punning metaphor only works if it draws from the “same species” or the “same sound.” Aristophanes’ pun works on both levels, since in terms of species, both belong to the category of “metal blades,” and in terms of sound, both have a -φορος ending, a disyllabic first element of the compound, and an initial ξ-, which is comparatively rare in word-initial position.

I argue that Aristophanes parodies ξιφηφόρος due to Euripides’ innovative treatment of the word, which deviates markedly from the earlier abstract usage of Aeschylus. In Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers* (468 B.C.E.), Orestes invokes a deity to ensure a favorable outcome in his imminent struggles (583–84):9

τὰ δ’ ἄλλα τούτῳ δεύρ’ ἐποπτεύσαι λέγω,
ξιφηφόρους ἀγώνας ὀρθώσαντί μοι.

I charge this one here [the deity] to watch over the rest and see that all goes right in the contest into which I take my sword.

Sommerstein’s translation grapples with Aeschylus’ abstract phrase, literally, “sword-bearing contests” (ξιφηφόρους ἀγώνας). What this means precisely is a matter of debate. Contests cannot literally carry swords, and thus translators render it in various ways: “direct the contest of the sword” (Smyth), “guide the actions of my sword” (Lattimore), and “guide my sword through struggle” (Fagles). Aeschylus deliberately uses language that is metaphorical and abstract.

Euripides was well aware of this Aeschylean usage; indeed, he pilfered the entire phrase in *Hercules* (ca. 416 B.C.E.), his first known play that uses the word ξιφηφόρος (809–14):10

κρείσσων μοι τύραννος ἐφικε
ἡ δυσγένει’ ἀνάκτων,
ἄν ὡς ἐσορῶντι φαίνει
ξιφηφόρων ἐς ἀγώνων

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8 *Tractatus Coislinianus* V. 4–6, in Janko 1984, 30–33, 183–86.
9 Text and translation from Sommerstein 2008.
10 When not otherwise noted, the Greek text is taken from the OCT and translations are my own.
There is some scholarly debate whether Agamemnon was killed with a sword or an axe in Aeschylus’ play. Fraenkel 1950, 806–9; Sommerstein 1989; and Prag 1991 favor a sword; Burkert 1966, 119–20, and Davies 1987 favor an axe. Marshall 2001b believes that we cannot ascertain the weapon used in the original performance, and argues that the weapon used in a reperformance of the Oresteia was an axe based on various allusions in Euripides. However, Torrance 2013, 42, detects another Euripidean allusion to Ag.: *IT* 621, “will you kill me yourself with a sword, female sacrificing male?” responding to Ag. 1231, “female murderer of the male,” in connection with passages in the trilogy that cite a sword as the weapon (*Ag.* 1262, 1351, 1529; *Cho.* 1011). It seems that Euripides had the option of recalling the murder of Agamemnon either by using a sword or by using an axe, and thus we are no closer to ascertaining the original weapon used by Clytemnestra.

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Mastronarde 2010, 69–71, discusses the links and connections between two halves of the double structure of *Heracles*: the etymological connection between Lycus (< *luk-os) and Lyssa (< *luk-ya), scenic motifs such as the uncovering of one's head (*HF* 562–64, 1214–17), thematic links such as friendship and loyalty (φιλία), and connections in the imagery of a race with two legs (*δίαυλος*) at *HF* 662 and 1102.

13 Euripides concretizes and literalizes Aeschylean abstractions often. Torrance 2013, 33, demonstrates how Euripides concretizes Aeschylus’ image of justice shining forth in smoke-soiled dwellings (*Ag*. 773–75) into an actual smoke-soiled chamber (*El*. 1139–40) immediately before the murder of Clytemnestra, an allusion intended to legitimize the murder by evoking Aeschylean conceptions of justice. Torrance 2013, 69–75, goes on to explain how *Ag*. 897–98, in which Clytemnestra describes Agamemnon as a “firmly-footed column (στῦλος) that supports a lofty roof” and “a father’s only son (μονογενές),” provides the impetus for two Euripidean literalizations. First, Aeschylus’ metaphor of a human as a column is concretized at *IT* 50–52, in which Iphigenia dreams of a column (στῦλος), representing Orestes, that grows blond hair and begins to speak. Second, Aeschylus metaphorically applies the adjective μονογενές (“only son”) to Agamemnon (though technically incorrect, as he has a brother Menelaus), whereas Euripides’ *Cresphontes* fr. 448a, 71 applies μονογενές to Cresphontes according to the word’s etymological sense (as Cresphontes is an only child).

Did she do it or did she not? This robe serves as my witness to how it was stained by Aegisthus’ sword.

Euripides uses ξιφηφόρος for structural purposes in *Heracles*, in that the two passages containing ξιφηφόρος work as a framing device to connect the two halves of the play, much in the same way as the oft-cited example ἐφολκίδες (“towed vessels”), which appears at 631 and again at 1424. At 728–31, ξιφηφόρος marks the conclusion of the first half of the play when Amphitryon sends Lycus off to be killed, whereas ξιφηφόρος at 809–14 serves to introduce the second half of the play, immediately before the arrival of Lyssa and Iris. In *Heracles*, Euripides uses ξιφηφόρος both as a structural device and as a signal that he is aligning himself with the tragic tradition inherited from Aeschylus.

After so clearly and precisely preserving Aeschylean usage in *Heracles*, Euripides diverges from this pattern in *Ion* (ca. 414 B.C.E.), the next extant play that contains ξιφηφόρος. In this passage, Euripides implements two innovations: (1) he concretizes the meaning to modify human agents rather than abstractions, and (2) he presents sword-bearing men as a plot device designating a solution to a character’s current crisis. Creusa has just told the Old Man that she had been raped by Apollo in a cave (939–41), and the Old Man urges that she take revenge on someone,
suggesting Apollo himself, then her husband Xuthus, then her son Ion (972–78). At this point, the Old Man suggests a plot device to resolve her problem (979–80):

CREUSA: πῶς; εἰ γάρ εἴη δυνατόν· ὡς θέλοιμί γ’ ἄν.
OLD MAN: ξιφηφόροις σοὺς ὀπάονας ὑπίλισασ’. ὅπλαινας.
CREUSA: How? May it be possible! How much I wish to!
OLD MAN: Make your attendants sword-bearing.

The “sword-bearing attendants” (ξιφηφόροις ὀπάονας) represent Euripides’ shift to human agents instead of the abstract “sword-bearing contests.” Considering that Aeschylus had used ξιφηφόρος in such a way as to resist a literal interpretation, it is significant that Euripides abandons the metaphorical use in favor of a discussion about putting real swords into human hands. Although Creusa rejects the idea and the alternate plan of poison is ultimately accepted, Euripides presents the sword-bearing attendants as a viable plot device.

In Helen (412 B.C.E.), produced the year before Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae, Euripides offers his most notable plot device involving sword-bearing men. Helen and Menelaus need to escape from the Egyptian king Theoclymenus, and after dismissing Menelaus’ proposals to flee on a chariot or to kill the king, Helen hits upon a master escape plan. They will pretend that Menelaus is dead, disguise Menelaus as the messenger reporting his own death, and escape with a ship captured by sword-bearing men (1069–72):

HELEN: σὲ καὶ παρεῖναι δεῖ μάλιστα τούς τε σοὺς πλωτήρας οἵπερ ἔφυγον ἐκ ναυαγίας.
MENELAUS: καὶ μὴν ἐάνπερ ναῦν ἐπ’ ἀγκύρας λάβω, ἀνὴρ παρ’ ἄνδρα στήσεται ξιφηφόρος.
HELEN: It is most necessary that you be there, and the sailors of yours who escaped from the shipwreck.
MENELAUS: And besides, if I receive a ship at anchor, my sword-bearing men will stand beside each other.

14 Euripides linguistically reinterpreted a number of traditional words. To cite a parallel, Coughanowr 1984, 235–36, demonstrated that Euripides analyzed the word δίστομος as δισ-τομος, “twice-cutting, double-edged,” as opposed to the previous meaning of δι-στομος, “two-mouthed, with two entrances.”
The catalyst of the entire escape that Euripides orchestrates is the word \( \xiφηφόρος \), without which the attempt would have failed. Rather than toying with the idea of sword-bearing men as he did in \textit{Ion}, Euripides constructs the escape plot in \textit{Helen} with actual sword-bearing men, deviating even further from Aeschylus’ metaphorical usage. In \textit{Helen}, Euripides’ literalization of \( \xiφηφόρος \) is not only present, but almost flaunted, since sword-bearing men are used as a major escape-plot device to drive the action of the play.

It stands to reason that Aristophanes would have detected the verbal innovations I am attributing to Euripides, as Aristophanes constantly displays an in-depth knowledge of Euripides’ linguistic usage and plot constructions, likely due to the fact that he read and re-read Euripides’ works. Nieddu concludes that Aristophanes had access to a written script of Euripides’ \textit{Helen}, since he was able to contrive an elaborate comic scene involving some lines of \textit{Helen} replicated exactly, other lines replicated but with parodic variations, and further lines composed in a generally Euripidean style (2004, 351). Wright suggests that a culture of “literariness” pervades Old Comedy thanks to the prevalence of allusiveness, intertextuality, and sophisticated literary analysis in the genre (2012, 141–71). Certainly, the ability to re-read a scene from Euripides from a script would further afford Aristophanes the opportunity to notice Euripides’ inheritance of and deviation from Aeschylus’ abstractions.

Additionally, evidence from \textit{Frogs} suggests that Aristophanes actually recognized Euripides’ penchant for initially imitating and subsequently diverging from Aeschylus, particularly with regard to language. Aristophanes describes Euripides as an inheritor of Aeschylus’ art (939) who took the language of Aeschylus, which was “bloated with bombast and obese vocabulary” (940), and “put it on a diet and took off the weight with regimen of wordlets and strolls and little white beets” (941–42). I suggest that Aristophanes’ description of Euripides the inheritor, slimming down Aeschylus’ language, corresponds to my account of Euripides’ initial repetition of Aeschylus’ abstract “sword-bearing contests” and his later departure to the phrase “sword-bearing men,” transparent and literal language that could easily be understood by the audience.

By coining \( \xiροφορέω \) in \textit{Thesmophoriazusae}, Aristophanes engages in much more than a simple lexical parody of a unique Euripidean verbal development. Rather, he constructs the plot of the play so that his character Euripides is beset with the same difficulties that Euripides’ own characters are plagued with, and, consequently, Aristophanes stages Euripides as a character playing a role in one of his own plays. Because of
Due to extensive structural and thematic parallels, Wright 2005 argues that *Iphigenia among the Taurians, Andromeda, and Helen* belong to an escape-tragedy trilogy staged in 412 B.C.E. While the insecurely dated *Iphigenia among the Taurians* may have been performed in the years before 412 B.C.E. (the metrics of Cropp and Fick 1985, 23, date the play between 416–412 B.C.E.), the introduction of escape plots into tragedies was recent and created a new distinctive brand of tragic plot.

For further examples where Euripides uses μηχανή, see Mastronarde 2010, 274.

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17 Euripidean characters often go through numerous ideas before hitting the best option, as in *IT* 1017–28, *Ion* 971–83, and *Hel*. 802–1048.
After portraying the ineffectiveness of the standard tragic suppli-ant plot, Aristophanes shifts to a comic plot device by using ξυροφορέω instead of ξιφηφόρος, a transformation which flattens the high register of tragedy by substituting a mundane tool for a common tragic weapon and which mocks the effeminacy of Agathon, who does not own a sword but possesses enough razors to need a ξυροδόκη ("razor-rack," Thesm. 219), an Aristophanic hapax legomenon coined off Odysseus’ δουροδόκη ("spear-rack") at Odyssey 1.128.¹⁸ Aristophanes’ technique of correcting a failed tragic escape attempt with a more successful comic one is paralleled later in the play, when Aristophanes concludes by making Euripides resort to the comic plot device of a naked dancing girl (Thesm. 1172–225) after the numerous failed attempts at tragic escape plots (the parody of Telephus at Thesm. 655–764; the parody of Palamedes at 769–84; the parody of Helen at 849–928; and the parody of Andromeda at 1009–132). One can detect a sustained Aristophanic attack upon the efficacy of Euripidean poetics, culminating in the triumph of comedy.

I propose that Euripides responded to Aristophanes’ attack by crafting a paracomical retort in Orestes (408 B.C.E.) that reclaimed the plot device of sword-bearing men from Helen and asserted that his innovation of sword-bearing men was a successful tragic plot device, in contrast to Aristophanes’ claim that it was ineffective. Euripides composes his play in such a way that he recreates the circumstances from Thesmophoriazusae (which in turn adopted the circumstances from Helen).¹⁹ In Orestes, Orestes, Pylades, and Electra are facing the threat of death (Or. 755–58), much like Euripides in Thesmophoriazusae (or Menelaus and Helen in Helen). Orestes and Pylades develop the same two escape strategies

¹⁸A similar Aristophanic substitution of a mundane tool for a heroic weapon occurs at Ach. 317–18, “I would be willing to speak with my head on a butcher’s block (ἐπίξηνον),” which reprises a metaphor from Telephus fr. 706, “if someone holding an axe (πέλεκυς) in his hands should be about to strike my neck.” Platter 2007, 153–55, suggests that the exchange of the axe for the butcher’s block is “to literalize, and so trivialize, the image used by Telephus in Euripides’ play.” As for the meaning of ξυροδόκη as “razor-rack,” the –δόκη suffix meaning, “carrying case for multiple weapons,” is standard in epic, not only attested by δουροδόκη ("spear-rack," Od. 1.128), but also later on in Apoll. Rhod. by οἰστοδόκη (1.1194) and ιοδόκη (2.679, 3.156, 3.279), “quiver,” a case for multiple arrows. The closest lexical form for swords is ξιφηθήκη, only attested in the lexicographers and the scholiasts, and thus cannot serve as a model for ξυροδόκη.

¹⁹As there is a strong structural connection between Helen and Orestes, it is logical to argue that Orestes worked as a sequel to Helen, as Wright 2006 suggests. I would suggest that the motivation for such a sequel was to respond to Aristophanes’ attacks in Thesmophoriazusae.
used in *Thesmophoriazusae* (and *Helen*), through supplication of the assembly (774–76) and through sword-bearing men. Pylades explains the plan (1119): “We will enter the house as if about to die,” launching the escape plot along the traditional tragic plotlines of a feigned death; but soon after, he adds the element of sword-bearing men (1125): “We’ll have swords (ἐξομένεις ἔφη) hidden in these garments of ours.” The plan is implemented, and Orestes physically appears onstage as a sword-bearing man (ἐφιφύρως, 1504).

Euripides responds to Aristophanes’ criticism of his use of sword-bearing men in *Helen* by further emphasizing the aspects that Aristophanes had mocked. First, Euripides extends the process of literalizing the trope of sword-bearing men by actually depicting Orestes onstage as a sword-bearing man, further concretizing the sword-bearing men from *Helen*, who did not physically appear onstage, but were only reported in a messenger scene. This literalization also poses a direct response to Aristophanes, who similarly portrayed a razor-bearing man onstage in *Thesmophoriazusae*. Second, Euripides escalates the amount of sword bearing in the play. Euripides uses forms with ἔφη- (the root for “sword”) twenty-three times in *Orestes*, compared to five in *Ion* and twelve in *Helen*, the other two Euripidean plays which presented ἔφιφφόρος as a plot device. Φάσγανον appears thirteen times, and σιδήρον and its cognates appear five times in *Orestes*. Almost all of the occurrences of swords appear in the second half of the play after Orestes, Electra, and Pylades are sentenced to death and are in need of their escape plot. Euripides increases the quantity of swords just at the point where he co-opts the predicament from *Thesmophoriazusae*.

Furthermore, Euripides marks his paracomic response through specific metapoetic indicators, especially the word καινός (“novel”). Torrance has shown the extent to which Euripides uses the literary criticism terms καινός and καινότης (“novelty”) to mark his own innovations in plot over previous authors’ renditions, drawing examples from *Hecuba, Suppliants, Ion, Orestes, Medea, Heracles, Iphigenia among the Taurians*,

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20 *Orestes* portrays the relationship of philia (“friendship”) as more important than family, as Pylades proves to be more loyal to Orestes than his relative Menelaus (*Or.* 725–28, 752, 804–6). As such, the close friendship of Orestes and Pylades forges the same connection as the familial relationship between Euripides and the Kinsman.

21 ἔφη- in *Or.:* 291, 822, 1036, 1041, 1052, 1125, 1133, 1193, 1235, 1272, 1287, 1369, 1346, 1398, 1457, 1472, 1478, 1504, 1506, 1531, 1575, 1627, 1656.

22 φάσγανον in *Or.:* 51, 953, 1063, 1101, 1148, 1223, 1305, 1349, 1482, 1519, 1608, 1633, 1653. σιδήρον and its cognates in *Or.:* 864, 966, 1309, 1399, 1518.

A similar usage occurs at IT 1306, in which the messenger says he is “announcing a cargo of new (καινός) evils” and then reports how the purification ritual was a trick. It is interesting to note that in the messenger’s account in Iphigenia among the Taurians, Orestes and Pylades are described with the phrase, “they didn’t have swords in their hands (σιδηρον οὐκ εἶχον χεροῖ, IT 1367),” again highlighting the novelty of the inclusion of sword-bearing men in Helen.

On innovations in myth in Helen, see Wright 2005, 82–113; on the staging of the play in Egypt, see Wright 2005, 163–67; and on the philosophical themes in the play, see Wright 2005, 260–337.

**BEARING RAZORS AND SWORDS**

_Helen, Alcestis, Electra, Hippolytus, Iphigenia at Aulis, Bacchae, and Trojan Women_ (2013, 222–27). 23 A relevant example occurs at _Helen_ 1513, in which the messenger, about to narrate how Helen and Menelaus escaped through their plot involving sword-bearing men, informs Theoclymenus, “So novel (καινός) are the troubles you will soon hear from me.” Here, the novelty refers to the particular qualities of the escape plot used, which is to say, the inclusion of sword-bearing men. 24 In the next year, when Aristophanes called Euripides’ _Helen_ καινή (Thesm. 850), he was commenting on this innovation in addition to others: the overturning of expectations about which mythic variants to use, the unusual staging of the play in Egypt, the philosophical themes that pervade the work. 25 This Aristophanic assertion should be contextualized within his broader critique in _Thesmophoriazusae_ of Euripidean novelties as ineffective: Euripides’ supplication of Agathon failed despite his suffering a “novel misfortune” (179) and Euripides’ series of “clever novelties” (1130) fail to affect the Scythian Archer.

I suggest that Euripides responds to these Aristophanic criticisms of his novelty by marking his novel introduction of the sword-bearing Orestes with metapoetic signposts (Or. 1503–5):

καὶ μὴν ἄμειβει καινὸν ἐκ καινῶν τόδε·
ξιφηφόρον γὰρ εἰσορῶ πρὸ δωμάτων
βαίνοντ’ Ὀρέστην ἐπτοημένωι ποδί.

But see, this novelty takes the place of other novelties
I see a sword-bearing man in front of the house
coming out with agitation in his step, Orestes.

Torrance considers the remark alongside the other metapoetic usages of καινός in _Orestes_ (2013, 223–24): the addition of Menelaus to the plot...
(Or. 239) and the trial of Orestes (875), suggesting that the novelty expressed by the phrase ἀμείβει καίνον ἐκ καίνων τόδε is the “apparent murder of Helen, which we know to be a mythological novelty.”

However, I propose that the word καίνος points to a different referent, namely, the word ξιφηφόρος, marked in emphatic first position in line 1504, even before the audience realizes the identity of the sword-bearing man rushing onstage. Two syntactical points support this argument: (1) the deictic τόδε (Or. 1503) must have a local referent, and ξιφηφόρος is the word immediately following the demonstrative; (2) the γάρ (1504) is causal, explaining the thought expressed in the previous sentence. An additional metapoetic signpost lies in the verb ἀμείβει, which Collins has argued possesses the nuance of “competitive exchange (2004, 174),” signaling successive contributions by two parties that exceed one another. Under this point of view, Euripides and Aristophanes upstaging each other can be seen as a form of poetic capping. For these reasons, I suggest that the metapoetic expression of the line, “this novelty takes the place of other novelties,” should be interpreted in the context of the intertextual rivalry between Euripides and Aristophanes, in which the staging of a literal sword-bearing Orestes replaces Euripides’ previous plots using reported sword-bearing men.

My proposal is strengthened if we consider a parallel argument made by Wright, who detects a similar Euripidean response in Orestes to Aristophanes’ characterization of Helen as καίνος (2006, 36–37). Near the beginning of the play, Electra describes Helen as having long hair, declaring (Or. 128–29):

ἰδεῖ τὲ γὰρ ἄκρας ὡς ἀπέθρισεν τρίχας, σφίζουσα κάλλος· ἔστι δ᾽ ἡ πάλαι γυνή.

26 McDermott 1991, 131–32; and Wright 2008, 126, suggest that the novelty is not just the apparent murder of Helen but also the entire final hostage-taking scene, which Euripides completely invented.


28 On poetic capping in Aristocratic comedy, see Hesk 2007, and on capping in general, see Collins 2004.

29 There are other instances in which Euripides used πάλαι (“old-fashioned”) and παλαιότης (“old-fashionedness”) as forms of literary criticism opposite καινός (“novel”) and καινότης (“novelty”). At Hel. 1056, Menelaus rejects Helen’s escape plot, which involves her grieving at his feigned death, as “somewhat old-fashioned” (παλαιότης . . . τις), commenting on feigned death plots such as Aeschylus’ Libation Bearers (680–87) and Sophocles’ Electra (670–764). Although Euripides begins Helen on a similar path involving a feigned death, he innovates by incorporating sword-bearing men.
Wright suggests that this passage recalls the scene in which Helen cut off her hair in feigned mourning for Menelaus’ death (Hel. 1186–90), and more explicitly, that the phrase ἡ πάλαι γυνή (Or. 129) playfully reverses ἡ καινὴ Ἑλένη (Thesm. 850), showing that Euripides is engaging in comic techniques by inserting “in-jokes.”

If Wright’s arguments are considered along with my own, we can see that there are, significantly, two Euripidean responses in Orestes to Aristophanes’ mockery of his novelty. At the beginning of the play, Euripides is pseudo-apologetic, (mis)interpreting Aristophanes’ phrase “novel Helen” as referring solely to the physical characteristics of the character Helen’s bodily appearance, and thus, the return to the long-haired Helen seems to offer a corrected portrayal of Helen, as if he were taking Aristophanes’ accusations seriously. However, by the end of the play, Euripides exchanges the apologetic stance for a clear affirmation of his innovative plots with the phrase, “this novelty takes the place of other novelties,” highlighting his notable increase in sword-bearing men.

Furthermore, my argument, entailing intertextuality signaled by metapoetic markers, is consistent with the complex web of dramatic allusions in Orestes, some of which are marked with metapoetic words, as when Orestes and Electra discuss footprints at 233–34:

ή κἀπὶ γαίας ἁρμόσαι πόδας θέλεις, 
χρόνιον ἵχνος θείς; μεταβολὴ πάντων γλυκύ.

Do you want me to put your feet on the ground? 
It’s been a while since you made a footprint; a change of all things is sweet.

Much like καινός, Euripides uses the word μεταβολή (“change”) metapoetically to indicate a new direction a plot has taken, and by staging a discussion of footprints on the ground involving the characters of Orestes and Electra, Euripides recalls both Aeschylus’ Libation Bearers (205–28) and his own previous response to Aeschylus at Electra (518–44). The

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30This use of the opposite words καινός and πάλαι to respond to each other parallels my argument for a connection between ζυγηφόρος and ξυροφορέω, which similarly opposes different types of blades.

31 On μεταβολή as a form of metapoetry, see Torrance 2013, 44–46, who discusses this example among others (Bacch. 1266–67, IT 719–22, IA 500 and 1101, Tro. 615, HF 735, Auge
sheer quantity of allusions in *Orestes* (Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, Euripides’ *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *Medea*, *Helen*, *Andromache*, *Electra*, *Heracles*) has led Zeitlin to describe the play as “palimpsestic,” whereby “one layer can be deciphered under another; each one makes its own contribution, but the total effect is one of a bewildering and cumulative complexity” (2003, 314). It is logical to extend to paracomedy the same arguments that allow myriad interwoven allusions to tragedy.32

As is the case with all examples of intertextuality, some methodology must be established for assessing the strength of a proposed instance of paracomedy, and I propose that three criteria must be fulfilled: (1) **distinctive correspondences** between the two elements, (2) the **priority of comic element**, and (3) a suitable **motivation** for adopting the comic element. By **distinctive correspondences**, I mean correspondences between two texts that are sufficiently strengthened through specific and marked parallels in language, plots, scenes, and motifs so as to diminish the likelihood of all explanations other than paracomedy. Stronger parallels will tend to have an element that is unique, rare, or marked within tragedy which alludes to an element that is highly-prototypical or prominent within

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32 Revermann 2006, 107–15, demonstrates that the majority of the audience had a bottom-line theatrical competence, acquired from performing in civic choruses and from watching a wide array of plays year after year, and as such they had the capacity to recognize and appreciate theatrical allusions. The Athenians had a great ability to remember dramas, as evidenced by an anecdote of Plutarch (*Nic*. 29.2–3) that a group of Athenian prisoners of war sang Euripidean songs from memory during the Peloponnesian War, which prompted their captors to free them. Torrance 2013, 287–88, suggests that audience members engaged in post-performance discussion of the drama, “multiplying the number of people who become aware of a playwright’s techniques.”
BEARING RAZORS AND SWORDS

The correspondences in Castellani 2010, 47–58, are often too vague, eliding the important differences between the two texts, which make it unlikely that the audience would detect the allusion and which would allow for the proposed correspondence to point to another text. For example, Castellani proposes as a parallel the fact that both plays begin with a pair in exile and that both have an unwelcome chorus. Yet there are significant differences that would disallow audience recognition: (1) Peisetairos and Euelpides have voluntarily left Athens, whereas Oedipus and Antigone have been expelled; (2) the chorus of *Birds* actually attacks the pair physically, whereas the chorus of *Oedipus at Colonus* simply does not receive the pair hospitably. Additionally, the proposed correspondences do not exclude other potential targets, as the features “pair in exile” and “unwelcome chorus” could equally point to the *Oresteia*, which has Orestes and Pylades as a pair in exile in *Libation Bearers* and a hostile chorus in *Eumenides*.

For determining the *priority of the comic element*, the best scenario is when both plays are securely dated, and the comedy precedes the tragedy. This criterion bolsters the arguments of Dover (1972), who argues that Euripides’ *Helen* 1107–13 (412 B.C.E.) alludes to Aristophanes’ *Birds* 209–16 (414 B.C.E.), but detracts from those of Herington (1963), who suggests that Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* (458 B.C.E.) draws upon the plots of Old Comedy, a problematic claim since our earliest attested complete play of Old Comedy, Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*, is dated to 425 B.C.E., and we have little evidence of the plots of Old Comedy that precede the *Oresteia*. In a case where the chronology is unclear, one must rely on whether paratragedy or paracomedy makes the most sense in terms of ordering. Marshall offers an example of reasoning through the different orderings of plays involving paratragedy and paracomedy, arguing for the order of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (458 B.C.E.), Aristophanes’ *Birds* (414 B.C.E.), and Sophocles’ *Chryses* (undated), based on the phrasing of the parallels (2009, 145–49). In other instances, the ordering of the plays may be impossible to ascertain. At all times, we should be aware of the fact that we only have a small fraction of plays from classical Athens, and that any given aspect of a play may allude to something which is no longer extant, or allude to nothing at all.

Third, one should explain the motivation behind the particular instance of paracomedy, something that may be beyond our scholarly

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means to ascertain in all occurrences. Dover, despite demonstrating distinctive correspondences and the priority of the comic element in his discussion of Aristophanes’ *Birds* 209–16 (414 B.C.E.) and Euripides’ *Helen* 1107–13 (412 B.C.E.), does not explain the motivation for Euripides’ adoption of Aristophanic language. However, other scholars have plausibly argued for various motivations. Sommerstein demonstrates that Aeschylus’ use of comic language characterizes the Erinyes as disgusting and horrifying figures, which increases the overall horror of the tragedy (2002, 163). In a similar vein, Seidensticker has argued that when Euripides appropriates comic material in *Bacchae*, the result is to increase the tragic effect of his scenes (1978, 316; 1982, 123–29). Scharffenberger offers a different approach when she argues that Euripides incorporated elements from Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* into his *Phoenician Women* (1995, 315): “it seems entirely credible that Euripides, upon finding something intriguing and important in *Lysistrata*, may have been moved and inspired to appropriate and adapt it, a year or two later, into his *Phoenician Women,*” something which “indicates the tragedian’s admiration for and appreciation of what the comic poet presents.”

With these methodologies in place, together with a number of secure examples, we can conclude that paracomedy was present, prevalent, and productive in fifth-century B.C.E. tragedy. While a tragedian may wish to incorporate paracomedy for various reasons, a major motivation is its utility as a performative response mechanism to critiques by comedians. As such, one can often detect two phases in the cross-generic dialogue: a paratragic claim in comedy followed by a corrective paracomic retort from tragedy. I have argued that, first, Aristophanes designed the escape plot of *Thesmophoriazusae* to parallel that of *Helen*, replacing the sword-bearing men of *Helen* with a parodic razor-bearing man. Second, Euripides constructed the escape plot of *Orestes* as a response to *Thesmophoriazusae* by increasing the overall quantity of swords as well as physically depicting a sword-bearing man onstage instead of a razor-bearing man. These innovative scenes and plots, which Euripides signaled to the audience using the metapoetic word καινός, served to upstage Aristophanes. Through the examination of paracomedy, scholars may envisage a more

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34 Compare the wide variety of manifestations of and motivations for paratragedy listed by Foley 2008, 21: “incongruous juxtapositions, ironic inversions, repetition to create critical distance, pointed contradictions and illogicalities, satire and mockery, avoidance of censorship, subversion of hierarchy, more neutral forms of intertextuality, or examinations of the role of imitation and representation.” A similar range of positive and negative connotations is plausible for paracomedy.
dynamic picture of Greek drama marked by mutual literary influence and nuanced intertextual dialogue. I hope that the above frameworks for identifying and analyzing instances of paracomedy enable the investigation of genre interactions to advance in its various permutations across tragedy, comedy, and satyr drama.  

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