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Ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἁπάντων ἐκεῖν᾽ ἂν εἴποιμεν,
ὡς εὐπόριστον μὲν ἀνθρώποις τὸ χρειῶδες ἢ καὶ ἀναγκαῖον,
θαυμαστὸν δ᾽ ὅμως ἀεὶ τὸ παράδοξον.

But on all such matters I would only say this,
that what is useful or necessary is easily obtained by man;
it is always the unusual which wins our wonder.
(*De Sublimitate*, 1, 35, 5)

Frammenti sulla scena

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Ancient Receptions of Euripides in Comedy: the *Phoenissae* of Euripides, Aristophanes and Strattis[1]

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Abstract

Strattis and Aristophanes each composed a comedy called *Phoenissae* that involved the reworking and re-writing of Euripides' *Phoenissae* into two distinct comic plays. This article uses the evidence from these three *Phoenissae* to reconsider the relationship between comic drama and Euripidean tragedy. It approaches the *Phoenissae* comedies as part of the ancient reception of Euripides, noting that both Aristophanes and Strattis are unique in creating their own terminology to describe their relationship with tragedy: παρατραγῳδῆσαι (Strattis, *Phoenissae* fr. 50) and τρυγῳδία/ τρυγῳδέω (Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, *Wasps* and *Gerytades*). This provides the starting point for examining how both dramatists used techniques of imitation, distortion and transformation of Euripidean tragedy in order to create independent comic plays called *Phoenissae* that draw on multiple tragedies, including Euripides' *Phoenissae.* Finally, this analysis provides insights into the ancient reception of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, with its curious choice of title, its unusual characterisation of Jocasta and the play's contemporary political resonances.

1. Introduction

There exist two comedies called *Phoenissae* (*Phoenician Women*). They were composed by Aristophanes and Strattis in the late 5th – early 4th c. B.C.E., and both draw on Euripides' *Phoenissae* and wider Euripidean tragedy.[2] As such they provide the earliest recorded responses to Euripides'

[1] My sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewer for her/his stimulating comments and engagement with this article. I welcome further thoughts and reflections from readers of the final article.

[2] Discussed by Miles 2009; Orth 2009; Fiorentini 2010; Farmer 2017.

Phoenissae, a tragedy which quickly became immensely popular in the Graeco-Roman world.[3] Three distinctive features shape this ancient reception of Euripides' *Phoenissae* in comic drama: (1.) it was transmitted via the same, contemporary medium (drama), and so it used the same dramatic tools in shaping its response Euripides (i.e. the visual aspect, sound, action, music, use of space, proxemics); (2.) both Strattis and Aristophanes were reacting to the first *performances* of Euripides' *Phoenissae* (not just a text) in creating their comedies, and so (3.) the two comic *Phoenissae* were produced specifically for *audiences* who were already accustomed to seeing Euripidean tragedy *in performance*. This article uses these three points to explore the unique insight that Greek comedy offers us into the ancient reception of Euripidean drama *in performance*, via the *medium of drama* before *ancient audiences.* The question is how much do these three factors influence the way that we analyse our sources, especially fragmentary ones, in order to understand how ancient dramas were received in the ancient world.

The study of the ancient reception of Euripidean drama and tragedy more generally has yet to take account fully of the role played by comedy,[4] and the *Phoenissae* comedies of Strattis and Aristophanes provide an illuminating example of how comic dramatists used the tools of their trade to imitate, distort and transform the tragic theatre of Euripides in order to construct distinctive comic dramas. The very existence of two *Phoenissae* comedies demonstrates the influence of Euripides' *Phoenissae* from its earliest performances in contemporary Attic culture. Therefore, the following analysis of these comic plays will be instructive for how Euripidean tragedy was received in late 5th and early 4th c. B.C.E. Athens, allowing us to consider which features of the original Euripidean play and performance drew the attention of two separate comic poets. This article will focus on the following points: Strattis' use of παρατραγῳδέω in his *Phoenissae*, mockery of stage mechanics on the *mēchanē,* the characterisation of Jocasta

[3] Papadopoulou 2008, pp. 104-17 summarises the ancient reception of Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

[4] Lefkowitz 2012 (1st edn. 1981) has explored one aspect of this: the importance of comic dramatists in shaping the later biographical tradition of tragedians; Revermann 2016, pp. 14-16 briefly discusses Aristophanes' *Frogs* as an important moment in the reception of tragedy. Farmer 2017 explores the relationship of comedy and tragedy, but not as one of ancient reception. For the effects of drama on audiences see Revermann 2006 on audience competency vs. Wright 2012 who plays down the power of performance and focuses on the textual nature of comic drama and its effects on audiences.

and the *agon* scene, Aristophanes' interest in Euripidean lyrics, the choice of title *Phoenissae,* and the contemporary political resonances of the tragedy.

Aristophanes is much renowned for making it a prominent and recurrent part of his comedies to adopt, adapt and distort the work of contemporary tragedies for his own comic or dramatic ends, with a particular focus on Euripides.[5] Modern scholarship unites all this under the unwieldy term paratragedy, and some scholars identify this solely with Aristophanes.[6] But Aristophanes was not alone in engaging with tragedy. Recent scholarship emphasises the importance of embracing the evidence in comic fragments alongside that of Aristophanic comedy to appreciate the relationship between Greek comedy and tragedy.[7] This points to comedy's engagement with tragedy as a wider cultural phenomenon that forms part of the ancient reception of tragedy, of which Aristophanes was only a part. By reframing this discussion in terms of reception studies this draws the focus to the unique dynamic between comic poets, tragedians and their shared audiences in receiving and responding to tragic drama *as a performance*.

Scholars have recently focused on Strattis, noting his recurrent interest in Euripidean drama.[8] His *Phoenissae* is the best preserved comedy that

[5] For example, whole scenes from Euripidean tragedy are comically reworked in Aristophanes' *Acharnians, Peace Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*. A comic Euripides character appears on-stage in three extant Aristophanic comedies and two fragmentary ones, which is more than any other *kōmōdoumenos* in Aristophanic comedy: *Acharnians, Thesmophoriazusae*, *Frogs, Proagon* and *Dramata* (either *Dramata/Centauros* or *Dramata/Niobos*). The definitive catalogue of Aristophanes' engagement with all tragedy remains Rau 1967. Miles 2009 and Farmer 2017 are an important step forward from Rau in terms of methodology and their inclusion of non-Aristophanic comedy.

[6] This position is most notably held by Silk 2000, p. 41; Silk 1993, p. 477: "Aristophanes' interest in tragedy is special"; Revermann 2016, p. 15: "[Aristophanes] appears to have been very interested in paratragedy, perhaps exceptionally so"; Nelson 2016 despite noting fragments, devotes little time to these. On the slipperiness of the term paratragedy see Miles 2018; Farmer 2017 is refreshing for his focus on comic fragments, but still within the framework of paratragedy: "Comedy's culture of tragedy forms one half, I argue, of paratragedy; the other half consists of parody … that is comic imitation, of tragedy." (p. 5). For further debate over the meaning and scope of the term paratragedy see Rau 1967; Foley 2008.

[7] See work on Cratinus by Bakola 2010 and Eupolis by Telò 2007; Miles 2009 provides the first overview of non –Aristophanic comic engagement with tragedy, while Farmer 2017 situates this within the wider context of Aristophanic comedy.

[8] Orth 2009 provides a full critical commentary of all the fragments of Strattis; see also Fiorentini 2008; Miles 2009, pp. 182-201 discusses Strattis' close engagement with tragedy throughout his work, including: Strattis' *Anthroporestes* and Euripides *Orestes*,

engages with Euripidean tragedy, and although only eight fragments are extant, these fragments demonstrate Strattis' interest in the performance of Euripidean tragedy. His *Phoenissae* contains two direct quotations from Euripides' *Phoenissae* (fr. 47, 48) one from Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (fr. 46), Dionysus suspended on the *mēchanē* (fr. 46), an on-stage Jocasta (fr. 47), and the first attestation for the verb παρατραγῳδέω (fr. 50). Such an intensity of tragic material in so few fragments is unique in our surviving sources, as demonstrated by Miles.[9] By comparison, Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* is similarly preserved in a mere seven fragments containing quotations from Euripides' *Phoenissae* alongside Aristophanes' trademark in Euripidean pastiche, as we shall explore below. Plot reconstruction for either comedy is not feasible, and together these comedies demonstrate the variation in comic technique when responding to Euripidean tragedy in performance. Euripides' *Phoenissae* (c. 411-409 B.C.E.) provides a *terminus post quem* for Strattis' and Aristophanes' *Phoenissae*,[10] although it is unclear which of the *Phoenissae* by Strattis and Aristophanes came first. Certainly, one comic dramatist would have had the opportunity to poke fun at the other in addition to Euripidean tragedy, but sadly the *Phoenissae* fragments give no direct indication of this. The only tenuous link between these two comic dramatists comes from Aristophanes' *Skenas katalambanousai* fr. 490 which may refer to Strattis' *Callippides* by title.[11]

Our discussion will begin with Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 50 which contains the first use of the verb παρατραγῳδέω in Greek literature. This overt self-reference to comedy's engagement with tragedy is compared to Aristophanes' use of τρυγῳδέω and τρυγῳδία.[12] Both Strattis and Aristophanes provide evidence that comic dramatists were developing a vocabulary to highlight to the audience comedy's relationship with tragedy. Next, we

Strattis' *Medea* and Euripides' *Medea*, and cf. possible links between Strattis' *Troilus* and Sophocles' *Troilus*; Strattis' *Myrmidones* and Aeschylus' *Myrmidones*; Strattis' *Philoctetes* and Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides' *Philoctetes*; Strattis' *Chrysippus* and Euripides' *Chrysippus*; Strattis' *Callippides* is named after the tragic actor. Miles 2009, pp. 182-201, Fiorentini 2010 and Farmer 2017, pp. 90-103 devote attention to Strattis' *Phoenissae* and its relationship with Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

[9] Miles 2009, pp. 305-12.

[10] Mastronarde 1994, pp. 11-14.

[11] ὥσπερ ἐν Καλλιππίδῃ / ἐπὶ τοῦ κορήματος καθέζομαι χαμαί 'just as in *Callippides*, I sit in the rubbish on the ground' (Pollux 10.28-9). Braund 2000, p. 151 argues in favour of this reading; Orth 2009, p. 28 cautions that this would be the first mention of a comic title by a rival comic poet in our sources.

[12] Ar. *Ach*. 499-500, 886; Ar. *Wa*. 650, 1537; Ar. *Gerytades* fr. 156; cf. Eupolis, *Demoi* fr. 99.29.

will move on to Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 46, which offers the most metadramatic engagement with Euripidean tragedy, imitating Euripides' use of gods on the *mēchanē* using the character of Dionysus, while fr. 49 mocks 5th c. Boeotian dialect and implicitly the Theban setting of Euripides' *Phoenissae.* Then we will compare how Strattis and Aristophanes adapt the verbal contents of Euripides' *Phoenissae,* with Aristophanes creating Euripidean-sounding lines, while Strattis brings the Euripidean Jocasta onto the comic stage and uses (mis)quotations of Euripidean tragedy. In addition, Aristophanes adapts and distorts Euripidean lyrics in his *Phoenissae*, as occurs in *Frogs*. Ideally reception studies seek not just to learn about the responders (the comic dramas) to the source, but also to shed light on the received text (Euripides' *Phoenissae*),[13] and the two comic *Phoenissae* help to highlight these prominent features of Euripides' *Phoenissae* in its original performance contexts. The article ends with a consideration of the curious choice of *Phoenissae* as the play-title, the unusual characterisation of Jocasta and the play's contemporary political resonances, all of which contribute to the more elusive question: why was Euripides' *Phoenissae* targeted by two comic dramatists who were contemporaries of the tragedian?

2. From tragedy to παρατραγῳδέω: a dramatic transformation

The most intriguing but difficult of fragments is Strattis *Phoenissae* fr. 50; difficult because it contains only one complete line, intriguing because it presents the earliest use of the verb παρατραγῳδέω. This is the oldest recorded usage of the verb, and the only one in classical Greek:

ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτὸν παρατραγῳδῆσαί τι μοι
[[ε]]κε . [. . .] ι ο[14]

'For, I (say/ask/want) him to paratragedize for me'

Here an unidentified character offers a self-reflexive comment on the activity of engaging with tragedy in a comic drama which the audience knows is drawing on Euripides' *Phoenissae* and wider Euripidean drama.[15] The difficulty is how to translate the verb παρατραγῳδέω. Later sources,

[13] Hardwick 2003, p. 4.

[14] The source for the fragment is Lex. Mess. (Orus, *Peri Orthographias*) f.282[v] 3.

[15] The question as to whom the ἐγὼ in fr. 50 refers to remains unanswerable. Suggestions include Strattis, Euripides or Strattis' comic Jocasta (fr. 47 below).

e.g. the scholia on Aristophanes, use the verb παρατραγῳδέω to mean: 'I speak in tragic style', but Christian Orth locates a more contemporary resonance between παρατραγῳδέω and παραδιδάσκω. The latter verb is found in the *Fasti* for 386 and 349 B.C.E. (*IRDF* 2318.1009-11 and 2318.1563-5 respectively), and it is thought to mean: 'I put on an extra drama' (outside of the competition).[16] Therefore, the addition of παρα- to the verb τραγῳδέω ('I perform a tragedy'[17]) could suggest an additional tragic performance. Given that Strattis borrows title and contents from Euripides' *Phoenissae* this provides a promising reading for παρατραγῳδέω. However, we can go further in analysing this new coinage by considering the wider connotations that it would have suggested to an audience hearing the word for possibly the first time. In 5th c. B.C.E. Attic the verbal prefix παρα- can mean: (1.) 'alongside, near, beside' (particularly with verbs of motion), or (2.) it can suggest a sense of 'surpassing, outstripping, overstepping', which may have negative connotations, and (3.) παρα- can convey a sense of causing change and transformation.[18] These three concepts also provide an instructive model for the way Strattis engages with Euripidean tragedy in his *Phoenissae*: first he demonstrates a close knowledge *alongside* his tragic sources, but there is then a point at which Strattis steps *beyond* his tragic model and injects his own (comic) narrative, which results in distortion of the tragic original. Lastly, the product is a *transformation* of Euripidean tragedy into a comic performance by Strattis. It is interesting to compare this with Margaret Rose's general definition of parody which itself takes into account the use of παρῳδία in ancient sources: "parody in its broadest sense and application may be described as first imitating and then changing either, and sometimes both, the 'form' and 'content', or style and subject-matter, or syntax and meaning of another work, or, most simply, its vocabulary". Rose goes on to note that the incongruity between source-text and parodying text can create humour, but not necessarily.[19] Linda Hutcheon presents parody as caught in a paradox of similarity and transformation: "a modern recoding which

[16] Orth 2010, p. 30.

[17] Ar. *Cl.* 1091; Ar. *Thesm.* 85.

[18] Schwyzer 1950, p. 493; examples found in fifth-century B.C.E. Attic Greek: παρακολουθέω 'I follow closely'; παραβαίνω 'I stand beside, I overstep'; παρέρχομαι 'I go beside, I surpass'; παράγω 'I lead beside, I lead astray'; παρελαύνω 'I drive past'; παραπλάζω 'I drive off course'; παροράω 'I disregard, overlook'; παραπείθω 'I beguile'; N.B. παρατεκταίνομαι 'I transform, alter' which occurs twice in Homer. In later Greek, *e.g.* the scholia on Aristophanes, there occurs παραπλάσσω 'I transform'.

[19] Rose 1993, p. 45.

establishes difference at the heart of similarity".[20] Rose and Hutcheon's modern definitions of parody embrace the ancient connotations of παρα- and are instructive for understanding the range of possible effects and meanings implied in Strattis' παρατραγῳδέω.[21]

However, it is particularly this sense of *transforming* that is of interest when we come to look at the fragments of Strattis' *Phoenissae*, as it encapsulates the connotations of παρα-: transformation requires a point of origin, a closeness to a source-text in order to initiate distortion away from that source-text and produce something that moves beyond it. Therefore, any of the following might perhaps capture the sense of παρατραγῳδῆσαι: 'to transform tragedy'; 'to distort tragedy'; 'to over-perform tragedy'; 'to out-tragedy tragedy'. The connotations of closeness to, and change from a source-text in παρατραγῳδέω are appropriate to the relationship that we will see Strattis creates between Euripidean tragedy, his audience and his comic *Phoenissae* in the fragments discussed below.

The use of παρατραγῳδέω by Strattis finds an important, earlier parallel in τρυγῳδία and τρυγῳδέω and other compounds which first appear in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (425 B.C.E.) and then infrequently in his extant work.[22] These words also occur at points when Aristophanes is engaging with tragedy, but whereas the Aristophanic τρυγῳδέω was created from the actual transformation of τραγ- to τρυγ-, Strattis employs the newly-formed verb παρατραγῳδῆσαι which contains the idea of transformation by the addition of the prefix παρα-. It is remarkable, then, and surely no coincidence that both comic poets who engage extensively with tragedy in their careers as comic dramatists employed language in order to express their relationship with the tragic genre. It is also possible that the two dramatists were employing their *own* distinctive language to express their individual relationship with tragedy. At the very least this use

[20] Hutcheon 2000, pp. 7-8 discusses various approaches to parody: "a productive-creative approach to tradition … it is not a matter of nostalgic imitation of past models; it is a stylistic confrontation, a modern recoding which establishes difference at the heart of similarity". See also Chambers 2010, p. xii: "parody should be understood as a permutating technical concept.".

[21] By contrast, the ancient word παρῳδία and its cognates are not in themselves helpful here, since they do not appear until Aristotle's description of Hegemon (Arist. *Poet*. 1448a 12-13), as discussed by Householder 1944 and Lelièvre 1954. Cf. Eur. *IA* 1147 where Clytemnestra refers to παρῳδοῖς αἰνίγμασιν ('obscure riddles'), but here the word functions as an adjective, without modern connotations of 'parody'.

[22] Ar. *Ach*. 499-500, 886; Ar. *Wa*. 650, 1537; Ar. *Gerytades* fr. 156; cf. Eupolis, *Demoi* fr. 99.29.

of vocabulary to express self-referential interplay between the dramatic genres indicates the developing relationship between tragedy and comedy, and most notably the dramatists openly share this with the audience; they *want* their audiences to perceive the connections between the dramatic genres.[23] The vocabulary used by Strattis and Aristophanes specifically invokes their relationship with contemporary tragedy, and we should remember that it is being actively communicated to the audience in the live-performance context of comedy, a context which invites and expects audience response and participation.

3. Dionysus in Thebes on the *mēchanē*: imitative distortion

In another moment from Strattis' *Phoenissae*, captured in a papyrus fragment, the comedy displays a different form of self-awareness of its high reliance on tragedy, and this again engages directly with the act of performing. Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 46 sees Dionysus enter a comic scene dangling in a state of high stress on the *mēchanē.* This makes a mockery of Euripidean divine epiphanies:

> Διό.νυσος ὃς θύρσοισιν † αὐληταῖς δει · λ
> κω [. . .] ἐνέχομαι δι' ἑτέρων μοχθ[ηρ]ίαν
> ἥκω κρεμάμενος ὥσπερ ἰσχὰς ἐπὶ κράδης
>
> Dionysus, I who with thyrsoi, † flute-players …
> I am entangled due to the wickedness of others
> I have come here suspended just like a dried fig on a fig-branch / stage crane

Despite the corrupted text in line 1 and the hole in the papyrus in line 2 (three or four letters in size), it is clear that Dionysus is quoting the opening lines of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (fr. 752) spoken by Hypsipyle: Διόνυσος ὃς θύρσοισι καὶ νεβρῶν δοραῖς.[24] This line and the use of the *mēchanē* indicate that the comic Dionysus is making his first on-stage appearance in this scene. The comic reality of being suspended on the *mēchanē* interrupts the tragic recital, and draws attention to the artificially constructed nature of a divine entrance on the *mēchanē.* The humour and enjoyment of this comic

[23] Foley 2008; Lowe 2000.

[24] Miles 2009, pp. 188; 323-4 offers a possible reconstruction for the papyrus text in line 2 to read κώμοις ('revels').

scene relies on its performance, and moreover on being aware of Euripidean performances with their propensity for divine epiphanies.[25] A comparable situation occurs in Aristophanes' *Peace* in which Trygaeus flies precariously up to heaven on a dung-beetle while recreating a scene from Euripides' *Bellerophon*.[26] However, Strattis' choice to include Euripides' *Hypsipyle* in his comic *Phoenissae* suggests an underlying logic and unity to Strattis' engagement with Euripidean drama. *Hypsipyle* was set on the road to Thebes, while *Phoenissae* has a Theban setting, but the latter notably lacks the arrival of a god on the *mēchanē* (however much it might have been anticipated). In the fantastical world of comedy Strattis can introduce the much needed divine epiphany into his comic *Phoenissae,* and thereby it adds a characteristic feature of Euripidean dramaturgy, and a comic re-writing of Euripides' *Phoenissae*. Strattis' choice of Dionysus is relevant, not just because of the god's close connection with Theban myth and Attic dramatic festivals, but also because he plays a prominent role in the choral lyrics of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, particularly where he is contrasted with Ares (in the *parodos*, the first and second stasimon) who represents conflict and Dionysus social cohesion, a fitting image for comedy. Strattis' re-creation of *Phoenissae* and Euripidean tragedy holds the greatest comic potential for those in the audience who had actually *seen* the tragic *Phoenissae* in performance, and who had a working knowledge of Euripidean drama.

Strattis manipulates the Theban setting of Euripides' *Phoenissae* in a different manner in *Phoenissae* fr. 49 where an unidentified speaker mocks Boeotian dialect in comparison to Attic. Like fr. 46, this fits with the Theban setting of Euripides' original *Phoenissae*, but here Strattis updates the comic context to include contemporary jokes contrasting 5th c. B.C.E. Attic and Boeotian dialect. Therefore, Strattis' *Phoenissae* is seen to use imitative distortion to transform Euripidean tragedy into a new, comic form of drama, which maintains its connection with the Theban setting of the original *Phoenissae* while also distorting the characteristics of Euripidean drama in its use of the *mēchanē*. Strattis engages both with the *performance* of tragedy and the metadramatic *idea* of performing tragedy. This is done using the visual, verbal and audial language that only another form of drama could manage, and this shapes the ancient reception of Euripidean drama that we see here. This technique is also observable in a different form in extant Aristophanic comedies such as *Peace, Thesmophoriazusae*, and

[25] Mastronarde 2010, p. 181; Taplin 1977, pp. 444-5 has been more sceptical about its use by Euripides.

[26] Ar. *Pe.* 154-79; other *mēchanē* jokes include Strattis' *Atalantos* fr. 4, Ar. *Daedalus* fr. 192, Ar. *Gerytades* fr. 160.

Frogs. However, the intensity of Strattis' engagement with Euripidean drama in his *Phoenissae* alone is remarkable, as we shall now explore.

4. Strattis' *Phoenissae* frr. 47 & 48: The Euripidean Jocasta on the comic stage

Strattis' *Phoenissae* frr. 47 and 48 provide a comic reworking of lines from the Euripidean *agon* between Jocasta and her sons. The close connection to the Euripidean source is seen by Strattis' choice to keep Jocasta as a speaking character in his comedy. Such use of a tragic character in comedy is a rarity.[27] Therefore, to an ancient audience watching Strattis' *Phoenissae*, this would be clearly identifiable as a distorted reperformance of Euripides' *Phoenissae*.[28] The audience need not have read the tragic play, since they could have experienced it first-hand at earlier festivals.

Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 47 is cited by Aristotle specifically as a memorable instance of Strattis mocking Euripides (Arist. *de sensu* 443b30), and the fragment is preserved in full by Athenaeus (Athen. *Deipn*. 4.160b) who states that Jocasta spoke these lines in the comedy:[29]

> παραινέσαι δὲ σφῶιν τι βούλομαι σοφόν.
> ὅταν φακῆν ἕψητε, μὴ 'πιχεῖν μύρον
>
> 'I want to give you both some *sage* advice:
> when you boil lentil soup, don't pour on perfume'

[27] The closest parallel is Strattis' *Medea* fr. 35 in which Creon was a stage character, which indicates Strattis' readiness to bring mythical figures on-stage; cf. Aristophanes' *Polyidus* fr. 469, which directly addresses Phaedra as a stage character; Aristophanes' *Birds* contains a Tereus and Procne who are associated with Sophocles' *Tereus* and Philocles' *Tereus*; a character in Platon's *Skeuai* refers to a Euripidean water-carrier, presumed to be the Electra of Euripides' *Electra* by Miles 2013.

[28] This also assumes that the audience of Attic comedy could be the same as that for tragedy, something which Ar. *Birds* 786-9 indicates did occur: αὐτίχ᾽ ὑμῶν τῶν θεατῶν εἴ τις ἦν ὑπόπτερος, / εἶτα πεινῶν τοῖς χοροῖσι τῶν τραγῳδῶν ἤχθετο, / ἐκπτόμενος ἂν οὗτος ἠρίστησεν ἐλθὼν οἴκαδε, / κᾆτ᾽ ἂν ἐμπλησθεὶς ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς αὖθις αὖ κατέπτατο. Bird-Chorus: 'For example, if any of you spectators had wings, then when he was hungry and fed up with the tragic choruses he could have flown off, gone home, had some lunch, and then, after he was full, he could have flown back to us.'

[29] κατὰ τὴν Στράττιδος τοῦ κωμῳδιοποιοῦ Ιοκάστην, ἥτις ἐν ταῖς ἐπιγραφο? μέναις Φοινίσσαις φησίν· παραινέσαι … μυρόν 'according to the Jocasta of the comic playwright Strattis, who says in the play entitled *Phoenissae*: 'I want to give you both some sage advice …' (Athen. *Deipn*. 4.160b).

The first line is a word-for-word quotation from Euripides' *Phoenissae* (line 460), but the second is a well-known proverb: 'don't pour perfume on lentil soup'. This provides the comic undercut to the tragic line, and Strattis employs the same technique in *Phoenissae* frr. 46, 48 and his *Troilus* fr. 42, which indicates that this particular way of blending tragic and comic discourse was a characteristic feature of his work, recognisable to audiences. It is also striking that Strattis uses Jocasta as a speaking character, making her reproduce one of her Euripidean lines *verbatim*. This would suggest that Strattis employed visual parallels with his Euripidean source in his arrangement of Jocasta on-stage, and her striking tragic costume,[30] in order to evoke the same *agon* scene in the tragic *Phoenissae*.[31]

The Euripidean line which Strattis' Jocasta performs is a pivotal line in the original tragic scene between Jocasta, Eteocles and Polynices. It comes as Jocasta attempts to persuade Eteocles to relinquish power shortly after he has arrived on-stage. The scene typifies Jocasta in the role of mother trying to bring peace within her family and to her city: if she can succeed, she will save Thebes from civil war and also prevent the self-destruction of her family line. This, of course, is not to be, as anyone who knew the story or had seen Euripides' *Phoenissae* would recognise. Therefore, it is both comically appropriate (and suitably ridiculous) that the Jocasta in Strattis' *Phoenissae* delivers Euripides' line offering advice to her children and then follows it up with some homely and stereotypically maternal advice in the form of a common proverb: 'don't pour perfume on lentil soup', in other words: don't spoil something good and regret it.[32]

The comic lines of Strattis fr. 47 even use Euripides' *Phoenissae* 460 to create rhyming line-endings: σοφόν … μύρον (despite the variation in pitch accent), while Euripides' *Phoenissae* 461-4 also contain two pairs of rhyming line-endings (involving –ῳ and – εῖν). Strattis is mimicking while

[30] Jocasta's distinctive tragic costume was of an old woman in dark, tattered clothes, her white hair cut short and worn loose: Eur. *Phoen.* 322-6. Cf. Platon, *Skeuai* fr. 142 which directly refers to Euripides' creation of a female water-carrying character: Εὐριπίδης δὲ ἐποίησεν ὑδροφοροῦσαν, which indicates the memorable visual impact of Euripidean characters.

[31] Taplin 1978, p. 101 describes tableaux as providing a fixed visual focus with "a lack of dramatic movement". Taplin notes that such visual effects work "so as to create a pictorial impression which will remain as a kind of after-image." At Eur. *Phoen.* 296-304 the chorus inform us that Jocasta is entering from the palace door, the central door before the audience, which the comedy could have imitated.

[32] The comic Jocasta's proverb has a meaning similar to: 'do not cast pearls before swine' or the Japanese expression: 猫に小判 *neko ni koban*, 'gold coins to a cat'.

distorting the sound, tone and effect of the Euripidean lines as well as their content. This is something that would be even clearer to the audience from Jocasta's physical presence in the comedy as well in the sound and pacing of her delivery of the tragic rhythm of the first line. Strattis creates humour by transplanting a Euripidean tragic character into comic space. However, Strattis' choice to include Jocasta is noteworthy in itself, since her character is a striking Euripidean invention. Not only is the Euripidean Jocasta noted for her rhetoric and central role in the reconciliation scene, but also her very presence in *Phoenissae* is remarkable: she is aware of her incestuous relationship with Oedipus (she declares it herself in the prologue!) and yet she still lives, whereas in all other versions her death or suicide follows her discovery of incest.[33] Therefore, Euripides has prolonged Jocasta's role for the reconciliation scene, and the novelty of this Jocasta, very clearly a Euripidean adaptation, attracted the attention of Strattis in creating his own comic distillation of Euripidean tragedy.

Although Strattis' Jocasta is made to speak a comic reconfiguration of her own tragic lines, Strattis preserves the Euripidean purpose of Jocasta's lines (to attempt to dissuade others from foolish actions). However, this sentiment is simplified by the comedy, making it easier for an audience to comprehend the point by using a common proverb, as well as offering the potential for laughter at the incongruity of Jocasta moving from tragic to comic mode so swiftly. A comparable effect is at work in Eupolis' *Prospaltioi* fr. 260.23-6 which simplifies a tragic quotation from Sophocles' *Antigone* 712-15 by removing much of the poetic imagery while preserving the core meaning of the original. Similarly, Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* 846-928 simplifies the recognition scene of Euripides *Helen* from a long, complex affair (involving ontological questions) to a swift embrace and an erotically-charged encounter.[34] Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 47 is recognisable as mimicry of the Euripidean scene, but it too has been comically simplified in the process of repackaging it for comic performance. Comic dramatists could choose to simplify Greek tragedy for their comic audiences.

This same effect is observable at Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 48, as we shall now explore. In Euripides' *Phoenissae* Jocasta's short address to her twin sons is

[33] Mastronarde 1994, p. 25; Davies & Finglass 2014, p. 365 Finglass remarks: "Only in Euripides does Jocasta survive and remain Queen".

[34] See especially Ar. *Thesm.* 913-16, including the sexual word play in line 913 which reworks Eur. *Helen* 566: ὦ χρόνιος ἐλθὼν σῆς δάμαρτος ἐς χέρας ('o come to your wife's embrace after so long') and substitutes ἐσχάρας for ἐς χέρας: ὦ χρόνιος ἐλθὼν σῆς δάμαρτος ἐσχάρας ('o come to your wife's hearth after so long'), where ἐσχάρα ('hearth') is slang for female genitalia.

followed by speeches from Polynices and Eteocles in which each son justifies his respective position, while remaining diametrically opposed to each other. Thanks to Pollux (9.123) we have another pair of lines from Strattis which again draw on the words of the Euripidean Jocasta as she replies to Eteocles. Most significantly this indicates that Strattis continued his engagement with the *agon,* this central Euripidean debating scene in *Phoenissae.* Sadly, all we have is Strattis' *Phoenissae* fr. 48:

> εἰθ' ἥλιος μὲν πείθεται τοῖς παιδίοις
> ὅταν λέγωσιν ἔξεχ' ὦ φίλ' ἥλιε
>
> If the sun obeys the children
> Whenever they say 'come out dear sun'

In this fragment, the first three words correlate with those of the tragic Jocasta (Euripides' *Phoenissae* 546). In the Euripidean tragedy this comes as Jocasta responds to Eteocles' speech, in which he had refused to relinquish power to his twin brother Polynices. This fragment from Strattis notably distorts the central point in the tragic Jocasta's argument: εἰθ' ἥλιος μὲν νύξ τε δουλεύει βροτοῖς, σὺ δ' οὐκ ἀνέξῃ δωμάτων ἔχων ἴσον; 'If even sun and night serve mortals, will you not be content with an equal share of this household?' Jocasta depicts Eteocles as a man who is trying to act against nature by refusing to share power (ἰσότης) even when the sun and night share their time equally. However, Jocasta's appeal to ἰσότης falls on deaf ears. The tragic lines have been noted for engaging with contemporary philosophical ideas,[35] and yet Strattis takes the complexities of their message and boils them down to a children's game, in which children would call out to the sun when it was behind a cloud in an effort to bring it into view. Whereas in the tragedy the sun is presented as figuratively in the service of mortals, in the comedy the children pretend that the sun actually obeys them in their game. At first glance the lines appear comically incongruous and inappropriate for the original tragic scene, but Strattis has adapted Jocasta's philosophical demonstration of ἰσότης and turned it into

[35] Heraclitus on the unity of opposites is noted as an influence by Craik 1988, p. 198. See especially DK 22 B87: Ἥλιος γὰρ οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή, Ἐρινύες μιν Δίκης ἐπικουροι ἐξευρήσουσιν 'For the sun will not overstep its measures, or else the Erinyes, guardians of Justice, will seek it out.' Euripides' connection with Heraclitean ideas is recorded in a late anecdote by Diogenes Laertius 2.22 (= DK 22 A4) in which Socrates discusses with Euripides the difficulties of comprehending Heraclitus' work.

a light-hearted reference to children at play. This is the same technique that was just observed in Strattis fr. 47, and in both instances Strattis re-sets and re-scripts Jocasta's tragic lines at an important moment in her original speech. Unfortunately, Strattis fr. 48 provides only the protasis of a conditional clause, so that its resolution remains uncertain, but it is clear that the tragic lines have been mimicked in the comic context. Both Euripides' *Phoenissae* 546 and line 1 of Strattis fr. 48 have identical iambic trimeters despite the verbal differences between the two, so that Strattis' first line carries the rhythmic, weighty qualities of the tragic line, which the audience could detect from the sound and intonation of the comic performance. Strattis is at pains to recreate a tragic performance only to collapse it into a comic one.

Strattis' *Phoenissae* frr. 47 and 48 demonstrate how the audience of this comedy was encouraged to recall the wider *agon* scene from the Euripidean *Phoenissae* in performance only for it to be comically adulterated with incongruities and comic interpolations. Yet Strattis replicates the structure, contents and character from this scene in the Euripidean original, making the connections between the two dramas easy to bring out in performance, and unmistakable when Strattis has also employed the Euripidean title, *Phoenissae*.

5. Aristophanes' *Phoenissae*: Rewriting and Reperforming Euripides

The fragments of Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* demonstrate a similar level of understanding of Euripidean tragedy, but the techniques used differ roundly from those found in the fragments of Strattis. As noted earlier, we have very few fragments for each comedy, but the diversity of ways that each comic dramatist engages with Euripidean drama is clear. The Aristophanic fragments illustrate an ability to imitate general Euripidean style in spoken (fr. 570) and sung form (fr. 573), as well as using direct quotation from Euripides' *Phoenissae* (fr. 574). We can contrast this with Strattis frr. 47 & 48, both of which use the technique of directly quoting from the tragedy and then undercutting the tragic line with a comic punchline.

Firstly, Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 570 makes clear the connection of his comic *Phoenissae* to the tragic *Phoenissae* by mentioning the central event of the Euripidean tragedy, the death of Polynices and Eteocles at each other's hands:

> ἐς Οἰδίπου δὲ παῖδε, διπτύχω κόρῳ,
> Ἄρης κατέσκηψ', ἔς τε μονομάχου πάλης
> ἀγῶνα νῦν ἑστᾶσιν

> Upon both children of Oedipus, a twofold pair of sons,
> Ares descended, and now they stand in a contest of single combat

Notably, these comic lines are not a direct quotation from Euripides' *Phoenissae*, but the description in fr. 570 has much in common with the scene between Creon and the messenger in Euripides' *Phoenissae*. This marks the climactic moment in the Euripidean drama where the death of Polynices, Eteocles and Jocasta is revealed to Creon just after he has entered on-stage overwhelmed by the death of his son Menoeceus. Rau pointed to a specific link with the messenger's words at Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1359-63,[36] but there are also verbal and thematic parallels with Creon's earlier lines (1354-5).[37] Aristophanes has picked a powerful scene of heightened emotion from Euripides' *Phoenissae,* an overwhelming and memorable moment, and he then proceeds to imitate it creatively. The style, tone and subject matter of fr. 570 are a clear imitation of tragic speech, particularly the recurrent use of the dual form and the choice of the verb κατασκήπτω (found in tragedy but not epic or lyric poetry).[38] It should be clear from the sound of the Greek (as well as its translation) that Aristophanes has employed an excessive number of dual forms for nouns and adjectives which contrast with the 'single combat' of line 2. Aristophanes is here purposefully exaggerating the high-style, over-inflating it to the point of comic distortion. Aristophanes' reworking of this intensely dramatic moment undercuts the tone by distorting the sound with the excessive number of dual forms and by the repeated alternation of π- and δ-sounds in the first line.[39] Aristophanes uses comic licence to heighten the tragic sound of these lines, and so he restages this highly fraught moment of Euripides' *Phoenissae* and rewrites the lines so that to an audience the tragic tone is unmistakable, but overdone.

[36] Rau 1967, p. 216. ἐπεὶ δὲ χαλκέοις σῶμ᾽ ἐκοσμήσανθ᾽ ὅπλοις / οἱ τοῦ γέροντος Οἰδίπου νεανίαι, /ἔστησαν ἐλθόντ᾽ ἐς μέσον μεταίχμιον / δισσὼ στρατηγὼ καὶ διπλὼ στρατηλάτα / ὡς εἰς ἀγῶνα μονομάχου τ᾽ ἀλκὴν δορός. 'And when the young men, sons of old Oedipus, had adorned their bodies in bronze armour they went and stood between the armies, two generals, two leaders of their forces, ready for the contest and battle of the spear in single combat'. Mastronarde 1994, p. 530 brackets off Eur. *Phoen.* 1362 (underlined above) as a tautology.

[37] πῶς καὶ πέπρακται διπτύχων παίδων φόνος / ἀρᾶς τ᾽ ἀγώνισμ᾽ Οἰδίπου; σήμαινέ μοι. 'And how has the slaughter of the twofold sons taken place, the duel spoken of in Oedipus' curse? Tell me!'

[38] Mastronarde 1994, p. 528 notes διπτύχων is a favourite word of Euripides, occurring eighteen times in his tragedies.

[39] Cf. Platon, *Eortai* fr. 29 which criticises Euripides for using too many σ sounds.

Aristophanes has even added a reference to Ares, who is a significant figure in tragic imagery concerning Thebes, and who has a prominent role throughout Euripides' *Phoenissae*, as discussed by Masaracchia.[40] The messenger goes on to refer to Ares metonymically as he describes the stalemate between the brothers (Eur. *Phoen.* 1402-3: ἐξ ἴσου δ᾽ Ἄρης / ἦν). Notably, it is this image of the brothers that Aristophanes draws upon in his pastiche of the Euripidean original. This image was already implanted in the audience's minds back in the *parodos* of Euripides' *Phoenissae* (lines 253-5). Here the chorus had connected Ares' threat to Thebes with the future death of Polynices and Eteocles, and this nexus of images served as inspiration for Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 570. The connection between Thebes and Ares is one that Aristophanes forges elsewhere in his work, notably at *Frogs* 1021 where the comic Aeschylus describes his *Seven Against Thebes* as 'a drama full of Ares' (δρᾶμα ποήσας Ἄρεως μεστόν). We see Aristophanes conceptualising his caricature of tragic Thebes using the imagery of Ares as a lynch-pin. In his *Phoenissae* Aristophanes represents the key piece of action in Euripides' *Phoenissae* – the battle between Polynices and Eteocles – without even quoting directly from it. For those in the audience who could recall the performance of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, including those with access to texts, this carefully constructed mimicry of this Euripidean scene would be particularly pronounced alongside the generalised mockery of Euripidean tragedy.

This ability to imitate Euripidean style is something that we also find in Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 573, but this time Aristophanes' focus is on Euripidean lyrics, not speech. Aristophanes could rely on his audience recognising the distinctive sound of Euripidean lyrics because his comedy is contemporary with the actual performance of Euripidean tragedy. Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 573 mocks Euripidean monody without employing a specific Euripidean source:

> στίλβη θ' ἡ κατὰ νύκτα μοι
> φλογ' ἀνασειράζεις ἐπὶ τῷ λυχνείῳ
>
> Lamp, you who during the night
> rein in your flame for me on the lamp-stand.

Here Aristophanes draws a focus on the musical aspect of Euripidean tragedy, just as at *Frogs* 1309-63 he makes a point of reworking both Euripidean monody and lyrics. Indeed, the only other recorded Aristo-

[40] Masaracchia 1987.

phanic reference to Euripides' *Phoenissae* occurs at *Frogs* 1337 in the mockery of Euripidean monodies, and which echoes the phrase from Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1031: φόνια φόνιος. Therefore, Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 573 provides further evidence that one of Aristophanes' interests in Euripides' *Phoenissae* involved mining Euripidean musical sections for comic potential, drawing on stylistic features which marked a monody as unmistakably Euripidean. Notably Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 573 also contains non-tragic vocabulary, which describes a domestic lamp (στίλβη and λυχνείῳ), whereas the metaphor φλογ' ἀνασειράζεις is poetic, and the concept of reining in the flame of a mere house-lamp is hyperbolic. Moreover, the verb ἀνασειράζω is uncommon in the fifth century B.C.E., and this is its only known instance in comedy. It occurs also once at Euripides' *Hippolytus* 237 where it is again used figuratively of Phaedra being controlled by the gods. Therefore, the low-style subject matter, a house-lamp, is here treated to a high-style lyric treatment, using Euripidean vocabulary, a technique which Aristophanes repeats in *Frogs* 1309-63.

Finally, in Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 574 there is a direct quotation of Euripides' *Phoenissae* 182: ὦ Νέμεσι, βαρύβρομοί τε βρονταί 'o Nemesis and light-roaring thunder'. The sound of Euripides' *Phoenissae* attracted the attention of Aristophanes' comic ear on several occasions, and the tragedy is notable for the large number of monodies, lyric exchanges and choral lyrics. Euripides' *Phoenissae* 182 is sung by Antigone as she observes Polynices' army from the walls alongside the tutor. This *teichoscopia* scene owes much to *Iliad* 3.161-242 as its model, but it is an innovation to stage such a scene in a tragedy (cf. *Aesch. Seven Against Thebes*). Therefore, if Aristophanes chose to imitate this scene, rather than just the line in fr. 573, it would provide an excellent opportunity for the comic actors to stand on the *skene*-building and point out members of the audience for individual lampooning. We have already seen that Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* was closely engaging with its Euripidean source, and so it remains possible, in a comedy called *Phoenissae*, that fr. 574 could indicate a larger scale imitation of the Euripidean scene, as has already been observed in Strattis' *Phoenissae*.

Both Strattis and Aristophanes created a caricature of Euripidean tragedy by employing a range of Euripidean features: his adaptation of myth, his depiction of Jocasta and her speech, the *agon* scene from Euripides' *Phoenissae*, the style of Euripidean lyrics and monodies, and Strattis' mockery of Euripidean divine epiphanies on the *mēchanē*. Both comic dramatists take advantage of the incongruity between the diction, tone, vocabulary and style of tragedy in contrast with that of comedy, showing a self-awareness of the defining features of contemporary comic

and tragic drama, which are recorded in their creation of the terms παρατραγῳδέω and τρυγῳδία / τρυγῳδέω. Euripides' *Phoenissae* evidently served as a rich tragedy for Strattis and Aristophanes to harvest in order create their own comic adaptations and caricatures of Euripidean drama.

6. What's in a name? The significance of the title *Phoenissae*

The most obvious parallel between the *Phoenissae* of Strattis and Aristophanes is seen in the title; both comic dramatists chose to keep the Euripidean title in place. This provided a handy reference point for audiences so that all could identify each comedy as engaging with its sister art-form tragedy specifically through this Euripidean version of the fall of Thebes.[41] Sommerstein and Kaimio have argued independently, but convincingly, for the idea that the titles which survive for dramas were, by and large, those used for the first performances, and so the titles chosen by Strattis and Aristophanes are significant as part of their overt engagement with Euripidean tragedy.[42] Unfortunately no evidence for the identity of the chorus survives in either comic *Phoenissae*, but this is a common issue with fragmentary dramas, as Mastronarde's experiment in reducing Euripides' *Phoenissae* to a fragmentary play demonstrated.[43] It is highly probable that the comedies contained choruses of Phoenician women, particularly given that they each chose the title *Phoenissae*, and elsewhere in comedy a plural title identifies a chorus which takes part in the action (*e.g.* the plural titles of extant Aristophanic comedies, Cratinus' *Plutoi*, *Eupolis' Demoi* etc.).

The significance of the tragic title *Phoenissae* for ancient audiences emerges when it is placed in its fifth-century B.C.E. contexts. Firstly, it highlights one of the most notable Euripidean innovations in *Phoenissae*: Euripides' addition of a chorus of Phoenician women, who in the play arrive in Thebes just in time to witness the destruction of the royal household of Thebes. Both chorus and audience can only spectate as the tragedy unfolds, but the audience are in the company of an unusual chorus:

[41] There are no other comedies entitled *Phoenissae,* although Amphis and Alexis (mid-fourth century B.C.E.) both created comedies called *Seven Against Thebes,* the same title as Aeschylus' tragedy, but only one fragment survives for each so that their connection to tragic models is unclear. On comic plays with tragic titles see Bowie 2000, 2007, 2010.

[42] Sommerstein 2002; Kaimio 2000.

[43] Mastronarde 2009, p. 71.

no other versions of the Theban myth-cycle in tragedy prior to this contained a Phoenician chorus. This is a purposeful move by Euripides to adapt the well-known Theban myth-cycle, and to add in a non-Greek stage-presence to his Theban setting who were visible to the audience for much of the play (a device he repeats in *Bacchae*).[44] Therefore, the title points to a distinctively Euripidean version of the Theban myth-cycle, which Strattis and Aristophanes choose to borrow alongside contents of the tragic *Phoenissae*.

The distinctive Euripidean title could also remind the ancient viewer of the only other tragedy with this title: Phrynichus' *Phoenissae*, a tragedy set in the recent Athenian past that dealt with the Battle of Salamis. Phrynichus' *Phoenissae,* like Aeschylus' *Persae,* is notable for mythologizing recent Athenian history within a tragic format. This is a technique which Eupolis' *Demoi* later imitated by bringing on-stage the deceased Miltiades and Aristides, whose speech employs tragic and high-style tone; notably this comedy is also thought to date to the late 410s B.C.E., close in date to the *Phoenissae* plays.[45] Euripides' choice to name his tragedy *Phoenissae* has an added contemporary resonance when situated within the history of Greek drama, since it alludes to Phrynichus' political drama of the same name which played a role in mythologizing and memorialising the Battle of Salamis.

The influence of Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* over later tragedy is observable in Aeschylus' *Persae* (472 B.C.E.), which even adapted the opening line of Phrynichus' tragedy.[46] Euripides, by choosing to name his tragedy *Phoenissae*, was also placing his work within the tradition of engaging with earlier tragedy, as Aeschylus had done with Phrynichus.[47] Moreover,

[44] Eur. *Phoen.* 278-9: in Polynices' first address to the chorus he notes that they are foreign; cf. 294 on the chorus' non-Greek customs; cf. 301, 679 on their foreign sound; cf. the common origins of the chorus and Thebans 638-89.

[45] 412 B.C.E. is the dating for *Demoi* suggested by Kassel & Austin in *PCG*, vol. V, p. 343. Telò 2007, pp. 23-4 argues that the play dates to 410 B.C.E. and is directly involved in contemporary political events around the oligarchic revolutions.

[46] For a fuller discussion of the links between Aeschylus' *Persae* and Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* see Garvie 2009, pp. x-xi and Torrance 2013, pp. 271-2.

[47] It is even possible that the start of the *parodos* at Eur. *Phoen.* 202 imitates the opening line of Phrynichus' *Phoenissae*, like Aeschylus. Mastronarde (n. 25), at 215 is right to caution that this style of choral entrance is formulaic which is not sufficient evidence to indicate that Euripides was alluding to Phrynichus. However, given the additional information that Aeschylus too reworked the opening line of Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* the suggestion that Euripides followed suit in his *parodos* is an inviting reading given Euripides' ready use of Aeschylean tragedy, especially in his *Phoenissae.*

Euripides' *Phoenissae* is itself famous for its engagement with Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (467 B.C.E.).[48] Therefore, Euripides' *Phoenissae* is carefully interwoven with this rich history of tragedy and recent Athenian history via the works of Aeschylus and Phrynichus. However, it is more remarkable that two comic poets tag themselves on to Euripides' *Phoenissae* and this tradition by writing their own comic *Phoenissae.* A natural question is why they choose this play, aside from gaining dramatic kudos by attaching themselves to a dramatic tradition going back to Phrynichus with his mythologizing account of the Battle of Salamis.

To answer this question we have to look beyond the eye-catching title to how Euripides twists this popular section of the Theban myth about the death of Polynices and Eteocles into a new, contemporary concoction. Euripides makes his *Phoenissae* a play about the consequences of the failure of reconciliation, consequences which destroy both family and state.[49] The contemporary resonances of this dramatisation of myth for an audience in the 410s B.C.E. have not been missed by scholars. After all, this was a time when Athens faced a period of destabilising internal unrest, resulting in the oligarchic revolutions of 411 B.C.E..[50] Therefore, to find around this period not one but three plays entitled *Phoenissae* is all the more remarkable, given the political connotations of the Euripidean title, and its resonances with Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* with its memorialisation of the Athenian success at the Battle of Salamis. The two comic dramatists have chosen to engage with the title and contents of a Euripidean tragedy which hold strong contemporary and historical political connotations for the ancient audience.

Moreover, these connotations may run further. An extra level of cross-generic play may be at work here, given the similarities between the scene of Jocasta attempting to reconcile her sons in Euripides' *Phoenissae* and the reconciliation scene in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.E.). Scharffenberger has argued that Euripides drew on *Lysistrata* in the creation of

[48] For a recent discussion see Torrance 2013, pp. 94-133.

[49] Note Creon's remarks at the highly emotive moment when he has just entered, mourning Menoeceus' death and then learning of the deaths of Polynices, Eteocles and Jocasta. Creon twice bemoans his own loss and that of the *polis* (1310-11 and 1341). This is also the dramatic moment which is recalled in Aristophanes' *Phoenissae* fr. 570, which was discussed above.

[50] As noted by Mastronarde 1994, pp. 12-13, Craik 1988, pp. 44-5; Balot 2001, pp. 207-10; Konstan 1997, p. 104 even remarks on Eur. *Phoen.* 390-5: 'the city is Thebes but the ideology is thoroughly Athenian'. See also Konstan 2012 for a reassessment of these lines as reflecting aristocratic *parrhēsia* of 5th c. B.C.E.

this scene in *Phoenissae* so that the tragic *Phoenissae* recalls the scene of reconciliation between Athenians and Spartans in a contemporary comedy.[51] This would draw out further the contemporary significance of Euripides' own reconciliation scene set at Thebes.[52] Therefore, to find two comedies drawing on Euripides' *Phoenissae* by Strattis and Aristophanes may suggest that these were part of an ongoing dialogue with Euripides, and perhaps also building on the earlier work of Phrynichus. As Goldhill observes, "poetics are never easily separated from politics, especially in Aristophanes",[53] and yet there is no 'especially' about it until we explore the comic fragments, and in this case, those of Strattis. For, Strattis' *Phoenissae* frr. 47-8 engage with precisely the same long *agon* scene from Euripides' *Phoenissae* in which Jocasta acts as arbiter. Balot has discussed the ways that this *agon* would have held significance for a fifth century B.C.E. audience, particularly the rhetorical strategies employed by Eteocles to justify his position as ruler of Thebes.[54] However, it is Strattis in his comic *Phoenissae* who reclaims this scene for comedy, by joining in the metadramatic dialogue between Euripides and Aristophanes, observable in *Lysistrata* and *Phoenissae.* The failed reconciliation scene between the sons of Oedipus appears to reach back even to Stesichorus, a known source for Euripidean tragedy (*e.g.* most famously his *Helen*), since the Lille papyrus contains a mother character acting as intermediary between Eteocles and Polynices.[55] Therefore, the model for this scene has a memorable and rich poetic heritage, and it is one which fifth-century B.C.E. drama, both tragedy *and* comedy, chose to adapt into contemporary political discussions on the stage before their audiences. These discussions utilised historical events and tragic models that reached back to Phrynichus and his *Phoenissae*, a tragedy set at the Battle of Salamis, which was itself a key moment of hope, success and unity in Athenian history.[56]

[51] Scharffenberger 1995.

[52] For discussion of Euripides' borrowings from comedy see Seidensticker 1982; Segal 1985; Jendza 2015. On the links between the dressing scenes in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* and Euripides' *Bacchae* see Foley 1985, pp. 225-7 and Miles [forthcoming].

[53] Goldhill 1991, p. 186.

[54] Balot 2001, pp. 181-2.

[55] Davies & Finglass 2014, pp. 371-94 provide a commentary. Tiresias also appears in the scene while the mother is unnamed in the papyrus, but it is clear that she fulfils a role of mediator between her sons which is similar to that of Jocasta in Euripides' *Phoenissae* (see especially Stesichorus fr. 97.232-4).

[56] Foley 1988 identifies a similar scenario in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and its engagement with Euripides' *Telephus* and contemporary Athenian politics.

7. Conclusion

Euripides' *Phoenissae* came under comic fire from two near-contemporary comedians, Aristophanes and Strattis, who created distinctive comedies entitled *Phoenissae* that drew upon Euripidean tragedy and the tragic *Phoenissae*. Firstly, this indicates the power of this Euripidean tragedy to affect its original audiences because both comic dramatists chose to 'cash in' on this particular Euripidean tragedy in their respective *Phoenissae* comedies. Aristophanes and Strattis would not have done so in a comic competition on two separate occasions unless they felt that these comedies would succeed with their audiences. The significance of Euripides' *Phoenissae* in relation to the contemporary situation at Athens in the 410s B.C.E. provides an added impetus for the comic dramatists to engage with Euripidean drama, given their own ability to comment on current affairs, while also acknowledging Phrynichus' *Phoenissae* and its nostalgic memories of the Battle of Salamis. In particular, the reconciliation scene in Euripides' *Phoenissae* contained contemporary resonances for Athens in the 410s B.C.E., and, if Scharffenberger is right, it also echoed the reconciliation scene in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata.* This scene was then imitated by Strattis in his *Phoenissae,* contributing to the dramatic heritage of this Euripidean scene. It is important to recognise that this dialogue between dramatists across genres comes at a time of great internal instability in Athens. Whether the dramatists were uniting or arguing about the situation is not clear from the minimal fragments of the comic *Phoenissae*, but it does seem clear that a discourse was taking place before the audiences of the late 410s B.C.E., and it re-emerges later in Eupolis' *Demoi* of the 410s B.C.E. and Aristophanes' *Frogs* of 405 B.C.E..[57]

The two fragmentary *Phoenissae* comedies offer the earliest recorded response to Euripides' *Phoenissae*. This is a reception of Euripidean drama transmitted using the very same medium of drama, but via two comic dramatists. And yet Euripides, Aristophanes and Strattis all used the language of drama through their own staged performances, each of which relied on physical action, spoken and sung elements, dialogue and monodies, stage-machinery and proxemics. Their stage language was therefore one which contemporary audiences of tragedy and comedy knew how to read and decode in its use of visual, verbal, musical and action-

[57] *e.g. Frogs* 1417-66 Dionysus makes his final decision in the contest between Euripides and Aeschylus based on the advice each tragedian gives concerning the recall of Alcibiades and how to save the city.

based signals. One could say that comedy and tragedy were using different 'dialects' from this same language of drama, and they could use it to communicate very different tonal effects to their audiences. Therefore, the *Phoenissae* comedies of Strattis and Aristophanes are a unique example of the ancient reception of the Euripidean drama via performances. These performances were created with ancient audiences in mind since they could read the multifarious signs at work in a dramatic performance, be it comedy or tragedy. The intricacies of this comic engagement with the performance of Euripidean tragedy suggests that these dramatists expected the audience to be experienced viewers and interpreters (not just readers[58]) of dramatic arts.

These were comedies made for an audience who were familiar with Euripidean tragedies *in performance*, and especially Euripides' *Phoenissae*, which again marks a significant point in the ancient reception of Euripidean drama. Strattis and Aristophanes were writing for an audience who would appreciate and hopefully enjoy this comic re-performance of Euripidean drama. In any comedy the relationship between performer and audience is key to the success of a performance. When dealing with comic drama in live-performance, therefore, it behoves the dramatist to create plays which he expects his audience to engage with and even enjoy otherwise the performance falls flat. In the case of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, we find not one, but two separate attempts by contemporary comic dramatists to rework this tragedy into comic material and use it as a means to mimic Euripidean tragedy more widely. For the eponymous archon twice to commission comedies on the same topic with the same title hints at the popularity and interest in Euripidean tragedy in the late fifth and early fourth c. B.C.E.. But also it suggests the importance of these three *Phoenissae* amid the political debates of the 410s B.C.E. given the contemporary echoes in Euripides' *Phoenissae,* and the significance of Phrynichus' earlier *Phoenissae* set at the Battle of Salamis. Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* of 411 B.C.E. and *Frogs* of 405 B.C.E. provide fully extant examples of a taste among audiences for close engagement with Euripidean tragedy, and it is a bitter shame that the two *Phoenissae* comedies are only fragmentary now. Yet they contribute to a picture of the late fifth century B.C.E. as a period of frenzied activity in responding to the first performances of Euripidean tragedy, often with reference to contemporary Athenian affairs. The comedies of Strattis and Aristophanes draw attention to particular features of Euripides' *Phoenissae* that stood out to an ancient viewer of Euripidean tragedy: the unusual

[58] *pace* Wright 2012.

choice of chorus and title, the Euripidean Jocasta and the *agon* scene, Euripides' association with the *mēchanē*, and the power of Euripidean music. Each poet even employs distinctive vocabulary to express his relationship with tragedy (παρατραγῳδέω and τρυγῳδία / τρυγῳδέω). All of these elements create a comic distortion of Euripidean tragedy, but one which the audience could recognise amid that distortion. Here is where we see the power of comic drama to shape and reflect contemporary attitudes to Euripidean drama, and they are attitudes that persist in the later biographic tradition concerning Euripidean tragedy. In the fifth century B.C.E. the relationship between comic and tragic dramatists was complex and constantly evolving. Aristophanes' engagement with Euripidean tragedy has been the focus of past scholarship; his is not the only way, as we see from the *Phoenissae* of Strattis.

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