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Teknophagy and Tragicomedy: The Mythic Burlesques of *Tereus* and *Thyestes*

Teknophagy (τεκνοφαγία), or child-eating, is an apt subject for tragedy.¹ It introduces the theme of miasma, it escalates violence and epitomises the destructive family feuds that Aristotle prized as the most suitable stories for tragedy.² Therefore, unsurprisingly, the teknophagies of Thyestes and Tereus were dramatized in three fifth-century tragedies, all of them preserved only in fragments: Euripides' *Thyestes*, Sophokles' *Thyestes* (B) and Sophokles' *Tereus*'. What is surprising is the appearance of plays by the same titles in the comic tradition, including *Tereus* plays by Kantharos (C5 BC), Anaxandrides (C4 BC) and Philetairos (C4 BC) along with Diokles' *Thyestes* (B) (late C5BC- early C4 BC). Therefore, this study will first consider how Tereus' teknophagy was adapted to mythical burlesques, to then consider how comic adaptations of Thyestes' teknophagy influenced Seneca's *Thyestes*.

Of course *Thyestes* and *Tereus* are not the only comedies with clear tragic precedents; there are for example four *Orestes*, two *Agamemnon* and five *Medea* comedies.³ However, the Thyestes and Tereus stories are exceptionally gruesome as they both present a father made to eat his sons unknowingly. The Thyestes myth includes several components: Atreus' wife Aërope has an affair with his brother Thyestes.⁴ In revenge, Atreus kills Thyestes' sons and feeds them to him which,⁵ in

¹ s.v. LSJ τεκνοφάγος.

² Arist. *Poet.*1453b.20.

³ Nb. Furthermore, one *Philoktetes*, two *Seven Against Thebes*, one *Khrysippos* and two plays on *Oinomaos* and/or Pelops with fragmentary tragic parallels: s.v. TrGF. cf. Collard (2009), 317f. for an overview on the Atreids in particular, Taplin (1986), 167 for tragedies in general, and Dixon (2015), 21-84 for a thorough overview of trends in mythic burlesque.

⁴ Tzetz. *Khil.* 1.18.440-50; Apollod. *Epit.*2.10-12.

⁵ Aiskh. *Ag.* 1597-1610; Hyg. *Fab.* 246.; Apollod. *Epit.* 2.13. Nb. Σ Eur.*Or.*4, where the children are those of Thyestes and his wife Laodameia.

many versions, provokes a reversal of the stars.⁶ After the feast, Thyestes rapes his estranged daughter Pelopeia to beget his avenging son Aigisthos, which is emphasised in the *Agamemnon* tragedies.⁷

By contrast, Tereus' myth is more self-contained: King Tereus rapes Philomela, the sister of his wife Procne, and cuts out her tongue so she cannot expose his crime. Philomela then weaves a tapestry to tell her sister the story,⁸ whereupon the sisters resolve to kill Itys, Tereus and Procne's child⁹ and feed him to Tereus in revenge,¹⁰ after which they metamorphose into birds.¹¹

In both cases it is not immediately obvious how these stories could fit into a comedy. These titles are but a sample of a fragmentary tradition of mythical burlesque, a genre that seems to have flourished at the start of the fourth century in which the stories of heroes are developed into comic plots.¹² Nesselrath and Rau have each considered how Aristophanes mocks tragedy in his traditionally comic settings, a technique described by Manuwald as paratragedy,¹³ with particular attention to Euripides' influence on comedy.¹⁴ Dobrov has since pursued a similar methodology

⁶ Eur. *El.* 727-32; *IT.* 811-16; *Or.* 1002; Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf; Soph. *AP.* 9.98 in Jebb, Headlam and Pearson (1917), 93.

⁷ Aiskh. *Ag.* 1580-5; Soph. 247 Radt Σ Eur. *Or.* 14 Dindorf; Ov. *Ib.* 359; Sen. *Ag.* 293; Hyg. *Fab.* 87, 88; Dio Khrys. 66.6; Apoll. *Epit.* 2.14.

⁸ Arist. *Poet.* 1454b. 36-7.

⁹ Soph. 583 Radt.

¹⁰ Soph. 581 Radt.

¹¹ Soph. 589 Radt.

¹² Harsh (1944), 315; Nesselrath (1990), 189-204; Hunter (1983), 23f.; Csapo (2000), 118; Shaw (2010), 4f.; Konstantakos (2014), 162-5 and Hanink (2014), 264.

¹³ Nb. Manuwald (2014), 583, describes 'tragicomedy' as the fusion of comic and tragic elements throughout an entire play, and describes 'paratragedy' as unsustained references to tragedy in a comedy. Although Manuwald is developing terminology for Roman tragedy, her definitions are clearer than Revermann's (2006) 102, distinction of two forms of Greek paratragedy; one that follows a mythic plot and one that incorporates tragic themes into a comic setting.

¹⁴ Rau (1967) 17f., Nesselrath (1990), 19-89.

to chart comic developments between Aristophanes and Menander.¹⁵ By contrast, Taplin has focused on the iconographic evidence *phlyax* vases offer for the performance of mythic burlesques as an art form in their own right, rather than as a transition from Old to Middle Comedy.¹⁶ More recent studies have applied Taplin's approach to literary evidence to reconstruct this tradition by considering isolated fragments to help establish the content and terminology of the genre.¹⁷

As a result, scholars have distinguished a subgenre of mythic burlesques as tragicomedies that specifically mocked tragic presentations of the myths themselves, not least because three authors of mythic burlesque actually wrote separate plays entitled *Komoidotragoidia*.¹⁸ The term, however, remains a controversial one, Silk deems *Komoidotragoidia* 'an abortive experiment in classical Attic comedy', yet takes issue with the prefixing of tragedy as a superior genre in the compound 'tragicomedy', inherited from Plautus' famous assertion that his *Amphitryo* is a *tragicomoedia*.¹⁹ Polarising the genres in this way undermines the diversity of ancient performance by measuring tragicomedy against Taplin's distinct standards of either fifth-century tragedy or comedy rather than the interplay of the two, which seems to have made it so popular in the early fourth century.²⁰ Moreover since in Latin the 'c' in *tragicomoedia* simply elides more fluently when 'tragic' is prefixed, as is particularly clear in the uncontracted *tragicocomoedia* in Plautus' manuscript, this

¹⁵ Dobrov (1995). cf. Goldberg (1980), 15-17.

¹⁶ Taplin (1993).

¹⁷ Taplin (1993), 79-89; Hanink (2014), 264-7 and Konstantakos (2014), 160-5.

¹⁸ Dinolokos Suda δ 338 (South Italian), Alkaios 19-21 Kassel & Austin, Anaxandrides 26 Kassel & Austin. *Philotragoidos* = Alexis 254 Kassel & Austin, *Phileuripides* = Axionikos 3 Kassel & Austin. cf. Nesselrath (1993), 191; Bowie (2008), 153; Hanink (2014), 264 and Konstantakos (2014), 163f.

¹⁹ Plut. *Amph.* 59, 63; Silk (2000), 81. nb. Moore (1993) and Bond (1999) overlook these plays as precedents for Plautus' tragicomedy, whereas Höttemann (1993), 93f., discusses the overlap of Greek and Roman *Mythenparodie* more even-handedly.

²⁰ Taplin (1986), 163-9.

term need not prioritise tragedy as Silk presumes.²¹ Therefore, Plautus' *Amphitryo* is a mythic burlesque playing on tragic themes and content, rather than presenting a tragedy with a comic happy ending, in the manner of Euripides' escape-tragedies.²² Nonetheless Silk's notion of prefixing as prioritising can be applied to the Greek terms, for although the elision of *tragoidia* and *komoidia* could phonetically work either way, Greek consistently fronts forms of comedy: *hilarotragoidia*,²³ *paratragoidia*,²⁴ *komoidotragoidia*.²⁵ This consistent prefixing and variation of comic terminology suggests that whilst the subject-matter of all these forms was tragic, the presentation of humour and stage conventions were taken from very specific forms of comedy.

However, whilst scholars acknowledge that in the fourth century Greeks merged tragic and comic genres, there is no case study on the remaining fragments of a potential tragicomedy to see how it may have worked. Accordingly, in the rest of this article I shall argue that the teknophagy episodes of the *Tereus* and *Thyestes* burlesques parodied Sophokles' and Euripides' tragic adaptations of the same myths in *komoidotragoidia*, presenting comic cannibalism that Plautus himself later mocks:

scelestiorem cenam cenauī tuam
quam quae Thyestae quondam aut posita est Tereo.

The dinner of yours that I ate was more criminal than the one that was once
given to Thyestes or Tereus.²⁶

(Plaut. *Rud.* 508f.)

²¹ Christenson (2000), 58-9, for example, follows common convention eliding the term so that the line scans fluently, but de Melo (2011) 60-4, includes the extra syllable to reflect the manuscript tradition.

²² E.g. *Helen*, *Andromeda* and *Iphigenia at Tauris*. cf. Wright (2005).

²³ Rhinton T1 Kassel & Austin = Suda p 171.

²⁴ Strattis 50 Kassel & Austin. cf. Csapo (2000), 118.

²⁵ Dinolokos Suda δ 338 (South Italian), Alkaios 19-21 Kassel & Austin, Anaxandrides 26 Kassel & Austin.

²⁶ Nb. We cannot be sure if this jest was included in the Greek Comedy of Diphilos from which Plautus draws. (Plaut. *Rud.* 32)

To that end, we will first take Tereus as a case-study for considering how fourth-century burlesques presented teknophagy in tragicomedy, because the myth emerges in both Attic tragedy and comedy along with three fragmentary *Tereus* burlesques. Having considered the treatment of Tereus' teknophagy, we will turn to the sparser evidence for Thyestean comedy in Diokles' testimonia and fragments of Aristophanes' *Proagon*. This will allow us to determine how paratragedy, and therefore tragicomedy, may have reshaped tragedy, by comparing the comic fragments to Seneca's *Thyestes*.

Fragments of the Feasts

Before we can consider how a father feasting on his children could be presented in comedy, we must establish if the feasts were in fact the mythic episodes portrayed in the now fragmentary *Tereus* and *Thyestes* tragedies. According to the hypothesis in papyrus fragment *P.Oxy.3013*,²⁷ Sophokles' *Tereus* (468-414 BC)²⁸ included all of the events listed in our introduction.²⁹ As with *Thyestes*, Aristophanes incorporates Tereus into his comedy, in this case having Tereus appear as a hoopoe in *Birds*, with specific reference to Sophokles' *Tereus*.³⁰ Therefore Aristophanes draws on a tragic precedent to enhance his *Birds*, a comedy that does not pursue a mythic plot, but does provide a model of tragic parody for later mythic burlesques. Teknophagy is also prominent in the fragments of the Tereus comedies: for example, Kantharos' *Tereus* is also named ΑΗΔΟΝΕΣ (*The Nightingales*), referring to the

²⁷ P.Oxy.3013=757 Radt.

²⁸ Most likely produced before 414 B.C. because Tereus in his hoopoe form features in Aristophanes' *Birds*. (Ar. Av. 98-263)

²⁹ See p.2 above.

³⁰ Ar. Av. 100f. cf. Dobrov (1993), 194-6.

metamorphosis triggered by the feast,³¹ Anaxandrides' *Tereus* explicitly mentions the teknophagy, and Philetairos' *Tereus* refers to offal.³²

By contrast Thyestes' myth provides at least three possible plotlines. Thus the general consensus is that Sophokles wrote three Thyestes plays; the first treating Thyestes' affair with Aërope (A), the second relating the Thyestean banquet (B) and the third detailing Thyestes' incestuous conception of Aigisthos with his daughter Pelopeia (Γ), so that their son may avenge the feast.³³ This model separates the narrative into plays using Thyestes' relocation: one ending at Thyestes' exile before the feast as punishment for his adultery with Aërope, one ending with Thyestes' flight after the feast and one picking up on events after the feast when Thyestes retreats to Sikyon. Since Thyestes was later deemed the eponymous hero of each of Sophokles' plays, Thyestes' departure provides a natural closure to the first two tragedies before he finally arrives in Sikyon in the third tragedy. Though Sophokles could have covered Thyestes' adultery or his final exile, Thyestes' feast was most likely the subject of one of Sophokles' three plays because it is the result of his adultery with Aërope and the impetus for raping his daughter Pelopeia in Sikyon.

Like Sophokles, Diokles allegedly wrote at least two plays on Thyestes' myth, as indicated by a testimony of his *Thyestes* (B), so he presumably dealt with the central issue of the feast:

Διοκλῆς, Ἀθηναῖος ἢ Φλιάσιος, ἀρχαῖος κωμικός, σύγχρονος Σαννυρίωνι καὶ Φιλυλλίῳ. δρᾶματα αὐτοῦ Θάλαττα, Μέλιτται, Ὀνειροί, Βάκχαι, Θυέστης β'. . . τὸ δὲ Θάλαττα ἐταίρας ὄνομά ἐστιν, ὡς Ἀθήναιός φησιν.

³¹ Kantharos T1 Kassel & Austin = Suda κ 309.

³² Anaxandrides 46 Kassel & Austin, Philetairos 16 Kassel & Austin = Ath. *Deipn.* 3. 106. tr. Olson (2006).

³³ Radt (1977), 239; Böhme (1972), 10f., 32-43; Gantz (1993), 546; Fowler (2013), 435 and Lloyd-Jones (1996), 106f.

Diokles: of Athens or of Phlia, poet of Old Comedy, a contemporary of Sannyrion and Philyllios. His plays are: *Thalatta* (Sea), *Bees*, *Dreams*, *Bakkai*, and *Thyestes* B. *Thalatta* is the name of a hetaera, so Athenaios says [567c].³⁴

(Suda δ 1155)

Diokles' comic adaptation of *Thyestes*' feast is all the more likely if we consider the influence of Euripides' *Thyestes* (before 425 BC).³⁵ Euripides is regularly considered a model for mythic comedies because his escape-tragedies end happily and his plays were reperformed in South Italy in the fourth century,³⁶ where mythic burlesques gained popularity.³⁷ Diokles' *Bakkhai* (C 4BC) follows Euripides' *Bakkhai* (405-9 BC) and exploits the same cross dressing scene,³⁸ which suggests that Euripides' *Thyestes* also influenced Diokles'.

Whilst I refer to Sophokles' *Thyestes* B as '*Thyestes Feast*' on the basis of circumstantial evidence, Euripides' *Thyestes* features the feast more patently. The final fragment of the play includes the cataclysm, which Euripides consistently associates with the brothers' feud. In *Orestes*, the cataclysm is caused by *Thyestes*' theft of the fleece,³⁹ asserting Atreus' kingship and initiating *Thyestes*' exile, but in *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* the cataclysm is used as a gloss to represent the feast itself.⁴⁰ In Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.397b the sequencing of the aorist ἔσωσα indicates that the saving of the house has been achieved; the imperfect ἵζόμεν suggests by contrast that Atreus' establishing his rule is an ongoing endeavour. The shift in aspect

³⁴ C.f. Radt (1977), 240.

³⁵ Σ Ar. *Akh.* 433.

³⁶ Csapo and Slater (2004), 3f. cf. Mastromarco (2006), 138f., for a discussion of different levels of comic intertext with tragic dialogue or performance, the relevant texts are too fragmentary to reward further exploration.

³⁷ Cf. Bowie (2008), 144; Bosher (2013), 93, 100 and Dobrov (2001), 37 on Aristophanes' use of Euripides in particular.

³⁸ Diokles 4 Kassel & Austin.

³⁹ Eur. *Or.* 996-1006. cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 2.12.

⁴⁰ Eur. *El.* 699-736; *IT.* 811-17. cf. Plato *Pol.* 269a. n.b. Eur. *Or.* 14 suggests Euripides' presents his characters as reluctant to discuss the feast openly

and absence of the historic perfect tense suggests that the feast is in the recent past, thus was the action of Euripides' *Thyestes*, as opposed to recollecting events before the tragic action as Collard's translation proposes:⁴¹

ATPEYΣ
δείξας γὰρ ἄστρον τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδόν,
δόμους τ' ἔσωσα καὶ τύραννος ἰζόμεν.

Atreus
Having shown the contrary course of the stars, I saved my house and
established myself as ruler.

(Eur. 397b Kannicht)

This all serves to suggest that the feast was the focus of Euripides' *Thyestes*.⁴² In addition, as Bergk points out,⁴³ Aristophanes' *Proagon* (422 BC)⁴⁴ parodies the feast of Euripides' *Thyestes*, which had been produced shortly before.⁴⁵ Therefore not only did Euripides' *Thyestes* present the feast; but Aristophanes also parodied Euripides' *Thyestes* in a comedy about promoting tragedies, and apparently staged Euripides as a character.⁴⁶ Had Diokles adapted Thyestes' feast in one of his Thyestes burlesques he would have had a precedent to work from.⁴⁷

Unfortunately Diokles is the only comedian credited with a *Thyestes* and we have nothing more than a testimony for *Thyestes* B, which indicates that Diokles wrote two Thyestes plays. So, to understand how teknophagy may have been adapted for mythic comedy, we must turn to *Tereus* before considering how tragicomic devices may have influenced subsequent tragedy such as Seneca's *Thyestes*. With the content of the mythic comedies and the tragic predecessors established as far as possible, we can now investigate the fragments more closely and consider how

⁴¹ Collard (2009), 312.

⁴² Eur. 397b Kannicht.

⁴³ Bergk (1840), 239.

⁴⁴ Ar. 478 Kassel & Austin.

⁴⁵ Σ Ar. *Akh.* 433.

⁴⁶ Σ Ar. *Vesp.* 61.

⁴⁷ s.v. LSJ προαγών.

teknophagy could be funny, by examining how Aristophanes peppers his comic plots with tragic references and comparing how the mythic burlesques travesty tragic plots with comic humour.⁴⁸

Tereus

When turning to the *Tereus* comedies, the evidence is direct, not circumstantial. Of course, Tereus' most famous appearance in extant comedy is his role as the hoopoe in Aristophanes' *Birds*, where reference to Tereus' teknophagy is side-lined in favour of the visual humour of his character. The cannibalism motif is then transferred to Peisetairos who eats his fellow bird citizens at the end of the play: transforming carnivorousism to cannibalism.⁴⁹ But Kantharos' *Tereus* is listed amongst Dionysia victors as ΑΗΔΟΝΕΣ (*The Nightingales*), which suggests that unlike Aristophanes' *Birds*, it featured Tereus' feast as the impetus for Prokne, Philomela and Tereus' metamorphoses into birds.

The surviving fragments of Kantharos' play do suggest a focus on the women. The first flatters one of the sisters as an Athenian noblewoman, perhaps appealing to an Athenian audience at the Dionysia:

γυναῖκ' Ἀθηναίαν καλήν τε κάγαθήν

A beautiful and noble Athenian lady.

(Kantharos 5 Kassel & Austin= Photios (b, z) α 466)

However this could of course be undermined by the appearance of the woman on stage, or the comments that follow; indeed fr.6 suggests a more sordid flattery:

Κυδωνίοις μήλοισιν ἴσα τὰ τιτθία

⁴⁸ Nb. Rau (1967), 17f., distinguishes parody as the use of tragic references in a domestic comic setting and travesty as the use of comic motifs to relate a traditionally mythical plot involving gods and heroes.

⁴⁹ Dobrov (1993), 228.

Breasts like Cydonian apples

(Kantharos 5 Kassel & Austin= Ath. *Deipn.* 81d)

Given that Philomela is the sex object of the myth, the rape victim and not the wife, it follows that if Kantharos' fragment describes an onstage character, she is Philomela. Tereus' story invites gender jokes because those killing and cooking his son are Tereus' betrayed wife Prokne and her sister Philomela whom he raped.

By contrast, in Aristophanes' *Birds*, it is Tereus' wife Prokne who is sexualized by being acted by a mute flute girl, reflecting her metamorphosis into a nightingale through birdsong.⁵⁰ Romer makes a clear case for Prokne appearing as a flute girl on practical grounds, namely that she might play her flute to express birdsong, whilst Zweig convincingly identifies Prokne as a heavily eroticized *hetaira* actress rather than a drag actor.⁵¹ Here the mutilated victim Philomela never appears, while Prokne answers Tereus' call and receives guests with him, ignoring the issue of the revenge feast. There is no mention of Tereus having eaten Itys despite the fact that this triggered their metamorphosis, though the absence of this story is made conspicuous by Euelpides, who claims the couple are living like newlyweds (ζῆτε νομφίων βίον).⁵² This of course highlights the fantastical nature of Aristophanes' Cloudcuckooland, where Prokne and Tereus share their comic happy ending despite the violence that triggered their metamorphosis. Thus Aristophanes capitalizes on the bird form to present sexual comedy and glosses the cannibalism as carnivorous,⁵³ subverting the marital discord that traditionally causes Tereus' cannibalism to the marital harmony suggested by the cooking of bird citizens for Peiseteiros' wedding

⁵⁰ Ar. *Av.* 679-84, 1380f.

⁵¹ Romer (1983), 135-42 and Zweig (1992), 80.

⁵² Ar. *Av.* 163. Cf. Romer (1983), 135-42.

⁵³ Bowie (1993), 166f., points out that the metamorphoses cannot be divorced entirely from the feast, so the subtext remains.

feast.⁵⁴ Kantharos, however, applies the same sexual comedy, most likely to Philomela, in a plotline including Tereus' cannibalistic feast.

Consequently Kantharos' Prokne could not be a mute flute girl as Aristophanes' had been. Given that Kantharos' *Tereus/ Nightingales* told Tereus' myth, it follows that Prokne was less sexualized than her sister Philomela whom Tereus lusts after: whilst a mute *hetaira* could play Philomela after Tereus had cut out her tongue, the storyline demands that Prokne plot the feast aloud. There is also evidence of a conversation with Prokne about her marriage, which suggests she spoke in turn:

καὶ πρότερον οὔσα παρθένος
ἀμφογάπαζες αὐτόν.

And before, when you were a maiden, you would embrace him lovingly.
(Kantharos 7 Kassel & Austin = Photios (b) α 1301)

This contrasts courtship and marriage, inviting the comic stereotype of the dissatisfied wife. Again attention turns to the sexual discord between Prokne and her unfaithful husband, but in Kantharos' fragment Prokne is directly addressed and thus invited to speak, whereas in Aristophanes' *Birds* she cannot.

The speech of tragic characters is then parodied in Kantharos' play:

ἀμαξιαῖα κομπάσματα.

Wagon-sized boasts.
(Kantharos 8 Kassel & Austin = Photios (b, z) α 1118)

So whilst Aristophanes mocks elevated tragic language by having Tereus not only speak in a tragic style but also claim to have civilized the birds with language, here Kantharos explicitly mocks elevated tragic diction in his burlesque.⁵⁵ Of course we

⁵⁴ Ar. *Av.* 1688.

⁵⁵ Ar. *Av.* 100, 199f. n.b. Ar. *Av.* 280-6 mocks Philokles as Tereus' grandson, suggesting Philokles' *Pandionis* on the Tereus myth was derivative of Sophokles' *Tereus*. cf. Dobrov (1993), 195f.

cannot determine whose words are being criticized here as they could apply to any tragic character in a comic setting. But what this fragment does make clear is that the comedy is based not only on the mythic plot itself, but also on its tragic presentation; Kantharos' *Tereus* is a tragicomedy in both plot and tone. So although little survives of the feast itself, the evidence suggests that satirizing tragic presentations of a gruesome story makes the humour accessible.

Turning to Anaxandrides, we have more direct evidence of how Tereus' feast was parodied, and dialogue from Tereus himself:

ὄρνις κεκλήσῃ. (B.) διὰ τί, πρὸς τῆς Ἑστίας;
 πότερον καταφαγὼν τὴν πατρώϊαν οὐσίαν,
 ὥσπερ Πολύευκτος ὁ καλός; (A.) οὐ δῆτ', ἀλλ' ὅτι
 ἄρρην ὑπὸ θηλειῶν κατεκόπη

A: You will be called the cock.

B: Why, by the Hearth? Because I devoured the wealth of my forefathers like that fine fellow Polyeuktos?

A: Not at all, but because you, a male, have been henpecked by females ⁵⁶
 (Anaxandrides 46 Kassel & Austin)

Here the metamorphosis is explained away as a nickname, in stark contrast to the staged hoopoe and nightingale of Aristophanes. Rationalising the fantastic is a common device of mythic burlesque and here it suggests that the visual comedy of the metamorphosis was absent, allowing for greater emphasis on the crimes leading up to the feast and the feast itself.⁵⁷ Indeed, Tereus glosses the teknophagy as the consumption of ancestral property (οὐσίαν), dehumanising his son Itys. Many observe the monetization of children in mythic burlesque, claiming that in Ephippus' *Geryones* Kronos' eating of his children is not literal, but instead he sells the children

⁵⁶ N.b. I have altered the Loeb translation with 'cock' to reflect the phallic pun it presents in Aristophanes, 'cockerel' is also used in Sophokles (Ar. *Vesp.* 815, Soph. *El.* 18) cf. Segal (2001), 87. cf. Ar. *Av.* 285.

⁵⁷ Cf. Konstantakos (2014), 168-75.

to feed himself as Aristophanes' Megarian does in *Acharnians*.⁵⁸

However Itys is identified not simply as material 'wealth' but as 'ancestral wealth.' So whereas in *Acharnians* and *Geryones* children have a material value, in Anaxandrides' *Tereus* Itys is valued as a legitimate male heir. Thus, Anaxandrides travesties the tragic issue of succession by valuing Itys in the tragic sense as an heir and in the comic sense as a material asset. The synthesis of comic material wealth and tragic ancestral wealth is completed with a contemporary reference, as Polyeuktos featured in Demosthenes' near-contemporary oration.⁵⁹ The dispute focuses on the allocation of one daughter's outstanding dowry payment to the defendant and the relinquishing of the other daughter's dowry by her betrothed uncle; thus the ancestral wealth of tragedy is undercut with ancestral wealth in contemporary Athens.⁶⁰

So although, unlike Kronos, Tereus typically eats his child unknowingly as a punishment, and therefore according to the logic of his myth he cannot sell Itys, the teknophagy seems to be glossed as a loss of his son for profit. The reference to Polyeuktos undercuts the tension between the symbolic wealth of tragedy and the material wealth of comedy. This tension between the symbolic and the literal is immediately reiterated in Tereus' invocation of the Hearth, which is where the *amphidromia* (ἀμφιδρόμια) ritual for the newborn child took place but also where the family might meet for meals.⁶¹ Thus, Tereus' invocation aptly conflates the symbolic and practical social functions of the hearth, as he has just figuratively 'eaten' his own child.

⁵⁸ Dobrov (1995), 17; Nesselrath (1995), 22-6; Konstantakos (2000), 80f., (2014), 169 and Bowie (2008), 154 cf. Revermann (2013) 110-13, on Polyphemos' cannibalism in paraepic mythic burlesques.

⁵⁹ Dem. 41.

⁶⁰ Dem. 41.1-6. cf. On Atticization in mythical burlesque: Shaw (2010), 8f., Konstantakos (2014), 165-8.

⁶¹ Ar. *Lys.* 757; Σ Pl. *Thet.* 160e.

The punchline then displaces the cannibalism, suggesting that the women have consumed (κατεκόπη) Tereus, rather than Tereus having eaten Itys. The verb (κατεκόπη) is typically used to suggest the butchery of animals and people.⁶² Wilkins' translation of κατεκόπη as 'pecked to bits' imposes bird imagery, to continue the rationalization of the bird metamorphosis; the attack on Tereus renders him a cockerel henpecked by women.⁶³ This association is set up in context, but the typical use of κατακόπτω to cut down animals recalls Prokne and Philomela's butchery of Itys, as suggested by Olson's translation: 'reduced to mincemeat by females.'⁶⁴ Though this disrupts the logic of the joke as an *aition* for the bird metamorphosis, it accurately reflects the displacement of the cannibalistic feast. In either translation the violence of Prokne and Philomela is diminished to emasculate Tereus, as is suggested in Aristophanes' *Birds*:

ἄτε γὰρ ὦν γενναῖος ὑπὸ τε συκοφαντῶν τίλλεται,
αἱ τε θήλειαι πρὸς ἐκτίλλουσιν αὐτοῦ τὰ πτερά.

He's pedigreed, you see, so he gets plucked by swindlers, and the women
keep plucking out his feathers too.

(Ar. *Av.* 285f.)

Anaxandrides' surviving joke on Tereus' teknophagy alludes to the perversity of the feast by referencing the hearth, but it also relies on the dehumanization of Itys as 'wealth' and the displacement of Itys' physical butchery for the feast to Tereus' figurative butchery by Prokne and Philomela's revenge. Here Anaxandrides plays on Sophokles' tragic precedent by explaining the metamorphosis and presenting a tragic royal's view of parenthood, objectifying the son as an heir. Yet at the same time Anaxandrides uses the mythic plot to set up more familiar, Aristophanic jokes on contemporary family disputes and gender.

⁶² Hdt.1.48.73; 2.42; 6.75, Hdt. 8.92, Th.7.29.5, Ar. *Av.* 1688.

⁶³ Wilkins (2000), 293.

⁶⁴ Anaxandrides 46 Kassel & Austin= Ath. *Deipn.* 15. 690f. tr. Olson (2008).

Like Kantharos', Anaxandrides' fragments put a focus on female status and sexuality:

ἀλλ' οἷα νύμφη βασιλῆς ὀνομασμένη
μύροις Μεγαλλείοισι σῶμ' ἀλείφεται

But like someone referred to as a royal bride,
she anoints her body with Megalleian perfumes.

(Anaxandrides 47 Kassel & Austin)

This either suggests a low-status woman is beautifying herself as Procne or Philomela might, or suggests the only way in which Procne fulfils expectations as a royal bride, in contrast to her more attractive sister Philomela, who Tereus then rapes. Although the significance of the specific perfumer Megallos cannot be traced,⁶⁵ the Athenian origin of Megallos' perfume distinguishes the Athenian Prokne or Philomela from Tereus the barbaric Thracian, a distinction that Sophokles used to emphasise Prokne's loneliness in Thrace through her tragic monologue.⁶⁶ The use of this perfume to distinguish Greeks and barbarians re-emerges in Strattis' burlesque of *Medea*, as Medea sends 'perfume such as Megallos never produced' (μύρον τοιοῦτον οἷον οὐ Μέγαλλος πώποτε ἤψησεν) to the Corinthian Glauke as a bridal gift.⁶⁷ Anaxandrides, like Strattis, uses perfume to distinguish Greek brides from barbarian villains, but unlike Strattis uses this to signal the sexual availability of the new bride by focusing on its application over the body.

The final fragment of Anaxandrides is more elusive, but again introduces a sexual motif and the presence of birds:

ὀχευομένους δὲ τοὺς κάπρους
καὶ τὰς ἀλεκτρυόνας θεωροῦσ' ἄσμενοι.

⁶⁵ He is variously associated with Sicily and Athens. n.b. Athen. *Deipn.* 15. 690f.

⁶⁶ Soph. 583 Radt. cf. Dobrov (1993), 202f.

⁶⁷ Strattis 43 Kassel & Austin = Ath. *Deipn.* 15. 690 tr. Olson 2008. cf. Anaxandrides 41 Kassel & Austin and Antiphanes 105 Kassel & Austin, for similar examples of Egyptian perfume.

They enjoy watching the boars
and the hens being mounted.

(Anaxandrides 48 Kassel & Austin)

Here the animals are livestock and the reference to chickens specifically reflects Anaxandrides' rationalization of Tereus' metamorphosis by presenting him as the henpecked cock; the boars perhaps add another form of sexual innuendo. Given the fragmentary nature of the Tereus plays we have examined so far, we cannot suggest that the feast was altogether sidelined in place of sexual comedy. But in contrast to the all-male Thyestean feast, in which Aërope must have already been killed or exiled, Tereus' teknothagy involves female characters, inviting sexual innuendo and gendered comedy in a way that Thyestes' feast does not.

Philetairos also took on teknothagy in his mythic burlesque of *Tereus*, as his fragments reveal a banquet setting:

Φιλέταιρος δ' ἐν Τηρεῖ δύο ὕδατος πρὸς τρεῖς ἀκράτου. λέγει δὲ οὕτως·
πεπωκέναι δοκεῖ τὸν κατὰ δύο
καὶ τρεῖς ἀκράτου

Philetairos in *Tereus* (mentions) two parts water to three parts unmixed wine.
He says that:
He seems to have drunk a combination of two
parts (water)
and three parts unmixed wine.

(Philetairos 15 Kassel & Austin = Ath. *Deipn.* 10. 430)

The subject is Tereus, the only male diner at this feast, but with no reference to cannibalism. A more direct reference to the sanguine nature of the feast occurs in the following fragment:

ἐξῆς εἰσεκομίθη ταγηνιστὰ ἥπατα περιειλημένα τῷ καλουμένῳ ἐπίπλῳ, ὃν
Φιλέταιρος ἐν Τηρεῖ ἐπίπλοιον εἶρηκεν

Immediately, fried livers were brought in wrapped in what is called *epiplous* (omentum), which Philetairos in *Tereus* calls the *epiploios*.

(Philetairos 16 Kassel & Austin = Ath. *Deipn.* 3. 106)⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Cf. Arist. *HA.* 495b. 29; *PA.* 677b. 12-36.

Like Kantharos, Philetairos includes omentum (ἐπίπλοιον), a choice cut of meat that is typically used as a casing for other foods.⁶⁹ Here the humour draws on the omentum's anatomic and culinary functions as stomach casing and food casing, creating a grotesque *mise en abyme* when eaten by Tereus.⁷⁰ But the mixed wine and the delicacy of the omentum also suggest a lavish banquet befitting the tragic royals, juxtaposing the luxury of their feast with the grotesque irony of omentum as innards within innards.

Thyestes

Far from sanitising or omitting the gore of a cannibalistic feast, comic adaptations seem to revel in its physical, visceral nature. Aristophanes' *Proagon* presents a comic actor parodying a tragic actor, who is in turn roleplaying Thyestes, and is thus disgusted by pig snout, having seemingly eaten his own children:

ἐγευσάμην χορδῆς ὁ δύστηνος τέκνων·
πῶς ἐσίδω ρύγχος περικεκαυμένον;

I've tasted—a wretch—the guts of my children.
How could I look at a roast pig-snout now?

(Ar. 478 Kassel & Austin)

Initially, it seems natural that Thyestes would be revolted by meat, but the specificity of the cuts is where the real humour lies. Dohm rightly suggests that (χορδή) works as a *double entendre* signifying gut-strings and sausages,⁷¹ rather than choice sacrificial innards (σπλάγχνα).⁷² This accords with Wilkins' distinction: 'Where Aeschylus pictured the eating of children in the feast of Thyestes in an analogy with a sacrificial division of an animal into vital organs, flesh and entrails, Aristophanes has Thyestes

⁶⁹ Ath. 4.131 a-f; 14. 646e.

⁷⁰ Cf. Arist. *PA*. 677b. 12-36.

⁷¹ Dohm (1963), 57, Ar. *Akh.* 1040, 1119; *Nu.* 455; *Ran.* 576, cf. Kratinos 205 Kassel & Austin and Athen. *Deipn.* 9. 403 for various organs used in sausages.

⁷² Ar. *Plut.* 1169.

speak of the tripe sausages and snouts of his children.’⁷³ Thus Thyestes’ meal is especially gruesome, because it alludes to the vital organs of his sons as butcher’s cuts rather than as sacrificial offerings.

The sausages (χορδή) not only reduce the sacrificial *pathos* of innards to gluttonous *bathos*, since preserved meat would not have been eaten after a sacrifice,⁷⁴ but also present the preparation of the children’s innards. Unlike cuts of offal, sausages are ground and spiced,⁷⁵ which suggests an absurd culinary interest in Atreus’ preparation of the children as food. Thus Aristophanes imposes mundane culinary preparation on Atreus’ revenge feast for his brother and adds gruesome detail to the cannibalism: he exploits grotesque elements of the tragedy to comic effect by associating them with the everyday tone of comedy.⁷⁶

As a result the sausages made from the children are not simply eaten but tasted (ἐγευσάμην).⁷⁷ This provides a pun on a tragic use of the word, meaning to sample a punishment, in the way Herakles tastes his labours, or Admetos tastes grief, and the commonplace use of the word to mean sampling food.⁷⁸ Thus tasting his children deters Thyestes from eating pig snout, either because he is too aggrieved to eat or, more perversely, because snout is a lesser delicacy than his children’s innards.⁷⁹ In either case, what to eat next is the least of Thyestes’ problems! Again Aristophanes oscillates tragic emotion and comic gluttony to create humour.

We can only speculate as to how Diokles presented the cannibalistic feast in his mythic burlesque, but Philetairos’ *Tereus* mocked the tragic cannibalism as a

⁷³ Wilkins (2000), 18.

⁷⁴ Wilkins (2006), 143-4.

⁷⁵ s.v. LSJ χορδή.

⁷⁶ E.g. Ar. *Eq.* 443-94, *Ran.* 575f.

⁷⁷ s.v. LSJ γεύω.

⁷⁸ Soph. *Tr.* 1102, Eur. *Alc.* 1069.

⁷⁹ Theophrilos 8.1-3= Athen. *Deipn.* 3.95.

gastronomic feast in the way Aristophanes' *Proagon* presents prepared sausages in his paratragedy.⁸⁰ This grotesque presentation of the children as a delicacy was taken up by Seneca, whose Atreus butchers, boils and roasts Thyestes' children.⁸¹ Meltzer has suggested that the Senecan Atreus' 'fastidious concern with the culinary details of the banquet is eerily consistent with his requirement that Thyestes enjoy the meal.'⁸² But Meltzer has overlooked the parallel between this scene and Aristophanes' *Proagon* fragments, and the testimony to Diokles' *Thyestes* B altogether, neglecting the fragmentary comic tradition that Seneca manipulates.

Seneca's main departure from the *Proagon* is that Atreus prepares sacrificial cuts of the children, roasts the liver and explicitly saves not only the heads but also their hands, paralleling the *maschalismos* (μασχαλίζω)⁸³ mutilation of Agamemnon's corpse in Aiskhylos' *Khoephoroi*.⁸⁴ So although the Senecan Thyestes' feast includes the dramatic irony of the *Proagon*, the offal is sacrificial and suitably tragic. Nonetheless, Aristophanes' subversion of the innards from a token of tragic *pathos* to comic *bathos* becomes more striking if, instead of considering animal parts, we consider the ancient belief in the emotional function of internal organs for humans. For example, in Aristophanes' *Wealth*, Cario describes emotions seated in these organs, as he chides Hermes for complaining about the lack of sacrificial innards dedicated to him by turning to Hermes' own belly-aching:

ὁδύνη σε περὶ τὰ σπλάγχχν' ἔοικέ τις στρέφειν.

You seem to be turning some ache round in your own innards.

(Ar. *Plut.* 1131)

⁸⁰ Cf. Philetairos 15 Kassel & Austin = Ath. *Deipn.* 10. 430.

⁸¹ Sen. *Thy.* 764-7.

⁸² Meltzer (1988) p.315.

⁸³ s.v. μασχαλίζω LSJ 'murderers fancied, that by cutting off the extremities and putting them under the armpits they would avert vengeance.'

⁸⁴ Aiskh. *Kho.* 439-44.

Aristophanes specifies *σπλάγχνα* here to denote the sacrificial offal Hermes expects: the ‘liver kidneys heart etc., of the victim (but not the stomach or the intestines)’,⁸⁵ given to Thyestes in the *Proagon*. Nonetheless, Cario’s wordplay humanizes Hermes in his irreverent address, by suggesting that the god experiences visceral, human emotions in his innards, albeit in different organs than those from which Thyestes’ χορδή are made.

Aristophanes’ other Thyestean *Proagon* fragment echoes the comedy of Hermes’ visceral emotion, as Thyestes demands to know what he has eaten:

οἷμοι τάλας τί μοθ στρέφει τὴν γαστέρα;
βάλλ’ ἐς κόρακας · πόθεω ἄν λάσανα γένοιτό μοι;

I’m wretched, what’s turning my stomach? Go to hell! Where’s the toilet?
(Ar. 477 Kassel & Austin)

Here Thyestes stomachs sausages made from his dead children’s innards and feeds his pain with theirs in a display of dramatic irony. In this instance, even the comic stock phrase ἐς κόρακας takes on dramatic irony, since it literally translates as ‘go to the crows’: carrion birds that feast on corpses, as Thyestes has just done! This fragment also reiterates the visceral focus of comedy, because it reduces what would have been an emotional reaction in tragedy to a series of bodily functions. Thyestes’ churning stomach could be presented as comic, rather than horrific, using the visual humour of the comic costume with the overhanging gut and the toilet humour that immediately follows.⁸⁶ Layering the humour in this way allows Aristophanes to present his hallmark comic suffering as a mimesis: role-playing a tragic Thyestes in the *Proagon* must explode presentiments of a tragic performance with a comic suffering scene.

⁸⁵ e.g. Hom. *Od.* 3.9.340. Sommerstein (2001), 211.

⁸⁶ Cf. for evidence of comic costumes in mythic burlesques: Trendall (1991), 164; Walsh (2009), 247f., and Sonnino (2014), 137.

Though no fragment from Euripides' *Thyestes* describes the feast itself, its production three years before Aristophanes' *Proagon* and the testimony claiming that Euripides featured in this play, suggest that Aristophanes' fragments parody Euripides' tragic feast.⁸⁷ Nonetheless it is clear that Seneca's *Thyestes* picked up on Aristophanes' parody again, as Meltzer points out, the burp of Seneca's Thyestes 'belongs to the sphere of comedy, especially Aristophanic comedy.'⁸⁸ But Meltzer makes no specific reference to the 'Thyestes' of Aristophanes' *Proagon*, instead noting parallels in Euripides' *Cyclops*. Though this highlights parallels between Seneca and satyr play, the testimony of Diokles' tragicomic burlesque and Aristophanes' paratragic *Proagon* presents a more direct tradition of Thyestean comedy from which Seneca, I would argue, draws.

Furthermore when we compare both of these fragments from Aristophanes' *Proagon*, the pig snout must also assume a second function as a stage property that substitutes for Thyestes' recognition of his sons' severed heads. If we position the toilet humour in fr.477 after Thyestes' realisation that he has eaten his children in fr.478, then Thyestes does not associate his teknophagy with these physical side-effects; but if we trust Kannicht's positioning of fr.477 *before* fr.478, then Thyestes' stomach pains trigger the recognition of his teknophagy. The latter is a more likely sequence, given that the questions provoke an ideal tragic recognition:

πασῶν δὲ βελτίστη ἀναγνώρισις ἢ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων, τῆς ἐκπλήξεως
γιγνομένης δι' εἰκότων

Best of all is a recognition that emerges from the events themselves, where the emotional impact comes from a realistic source.

(Arist. *Poet.* 1455a 16-17)

⁸⁷ Ar. T4 Kassel & Austin.

⁸⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 911, Meltzer (1988) p.315.

Given that Aristophanes' *Proagon* parodies Euripides' recent *Thyestes* we might speculate that Thyestes recognized his children's heads in Euripides' tragedy.⁸⁹ Indeed Euripides used Pentheus' head as a recognition device for his mother Agave in *Bakkhai*, as she recognizes that she has beheaded her own child and not a lion.⁹⁰

What we can more readily suggest is that the heads revealed to Seneca's Thyestes follow a similar series of questions to those in the *Proagon*:

Quis hic tumultus viscera exagitat mea?
quid tremuit intus? sentio impatiens onus
meumque gemitu non meo pectus gemit.
Adeste, nati, genitor infelix vocat,
adeste. visis fugiet hic vobis dolor—
unde obloquuntur?

What is this tumult that shakes my guts? What trembles inside? I feel a restless burden, and my breast groans with groaning not my own. Come, sons, your unhappy father calls you, come! Once I see you this pain will disappear. From where do they interrupt?

(Sen. *Thy.* 999-1005)

Therefore, Seneca's recognition scene drew from either Aristophanes' paratragic Thyestes in *Proagon*, or the tragic adaptation that Aristophanes' parodied, given the close parallels between the questions of Aristophanes' and Seneca's Thyestes.

Though the *Proagon* specifically mocked *tragic* performances,⁹¹ suggesting that the recognition scene itself parodied an earlier *Thyestes* tragedy, Seneca's scene employs the same dramatic irony as Aristophanes' comic paratragedy with a grotesque effect.

⁸⁹ Σ Ar. *Akh.* 433.

⁹⁰ Eur. *Bakkh.* 1277. Nb. Aristotle criticises Karkinos' *Thyestes* alone for using the reversal of the stars as a recognition token for the feast. (Arist. *Poet.* 1454b 22-3)

⁹¹ Nb. Boyle, (2017), 422f., points out the ambiguity of *viscera* here which can mean 'guts', the womb (Sen. *HO.*1805, *Ov. Her.*11.118; *Rem.* 59; *Met.* 8.478, 10.465), and by extension children (Sen. *Ag.* 27, *Ov. Met.* 6.651), creating a macabre pun in the Latin.

Nevertheless when Aristophanes' 'Thyestes' contemplates eating pig snout this parodies a tragic recognition scene with the snout as a child's head. This case is strengthened by reflection on Wilkins' translation of fr.478:

πῶς ἐσίδω ῥύγχος περικεκαυμένον;

(Ar. 478 Kassel & Austin)

How can I gaze upon their charred snouts?

(tr. Wilkins 2000 p.21)

Wilkins inserts the possessive pronoun here and mistranslates ῥύγχος as a plural. Thus Wilkins' translation associates the snout(s) with the sons because the sausages in the preceding line are made from the children, without noting how this may have travestied tragic recognition scenes. There is no deictic pronoun to indicate a gesture to the snout as a stage prop and the subjunctive verb 'to look' (ἐσίδω) suggests that Thyestes is considering eating pig snout again hypothetically, without necessarily rejecting a snout onstage. Nonetheless, the facial significance of the snout, following Thyestes' description of his children's alleged innards as prepared sausages (χορδή), suggests that the snout plays on a recognition of his own sons' faces debasing another tragic device: the recognition scene.

The association of the children with pigs through the recognition snout (ῥύγχος) also subverts tragic expectations by emphasising the worthlessness of Thyestes' sons. If we compare Thyestes' sons' snout to the Megarian's daughters in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, their status becomes clear:

ἐγώνγα καὐτός φαμι. τίς δ' οὕτως ἄνους
ὃς ὑμέ κα πρίαιτο, φανεράν ζαμίαν;
ἀλλ' ἔστι γάρ μοι Μεγαρικά τις μαχανά·
χοίρους γὰρ ὑμέ σκευάσας φασὼ φέρειν.
περίθεσθε τάσδε τὰς ὀπλὰς τῶν χοιρίων·
ὅπως δὲ δοξεῖτ' εἴμεν ἐξ ἀγαθᾶς ὕος·
ὥς ναὶ τὸν Ἑρμῆαν, αἵπερ εἰξεῖτ' οἴκαδ' ἰς
ἄπρατα, πειρασεῖσθε τᾶς λιμοῦ κακῶς.
ἀλλ' ἀμφίθεσθε καὶ ταδὶ τὰ ῥυγχία,
κῆπτεν εἰς τὸν σάκκον ὧδ' εἰσβαίνετε.

So I say myself. But who'd be so senseless as to buy you, an obvious waste of money? But, I've got a Megarian trick: I'll dress you up and say I've got piggies. Put on these pig hooves, and see that you look like a fine swine. Because by Hermes, if you come home unsold, you really will find out what hunger is! Put on these snouts too, and then get into this sack here [...]
(Ar. *Ach.* 736-49)

Here the comedy is seated in the inverted values of the hungry Megarian, who views pigs as a commodity and daughters as a financial burden, dehumanising his children for his own gain. Thyestes' children are similarly dehumanised by their father's greed. Though they are male, Thyestes' sons are presented to be as worthless as the Megarian's daughters because they are not heirs to the throne, despite Thyestes' attempt to usurp Atreus.⁹² As a result Atreus uses Thyestes' children as a means to an end, killing them to exact revenge on his brother, though there is no suggestion that the murder would have been made explicit in the comedy, given the euphemistic reference to snout in place of the heads.

So although we can only speculate as to whether this reference to snouts parodied an existing recognition of the children's heads in Euripides' *Thyestes*, we can more confidently suggest that this recognition was adopted by Seneca. Much like the questioning that precedes Thyestes' recognition of the children, Seneca's recognition scene exploits the same dramatic irony found in the *Proagon*.⁹³ Meltzer points out that 'Atreus puns on *ora* when he tells Thyestes he will soon see the faces of his children,' when of course Thyestes will be shown the heads.⁹⁴ But, here too, Meltzer overlooks the significance of the *Proagon* as a precedent: both the snout as a

⁹² Nb. In Seneca's *Thyestes* Atreus is keen to test his own sons Agamemnon and Menelaos to ensure they are his, suggesting that aside from the younger Tantalos who arrives with his father, Thyestes' illegitimate remaining children were Aërope's thus can remain in the palace pretending to be Atreus' sons (Sen. *Thy.* 295-304, 327-333).

⁹³ Sen. *Thy.* 727-9, 1004-5.

⁹⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 977-9, Meltzer (1988) p.316.

parody of recognition and Thyestes' comic indigestion are reimagined as grotesque elements in Seneca. Thus Seneca's 'black humour' is not only led by Atreus as a reflection of his sadism, as Meltzer suggests, but also draws on Aristophanes' *Proagon* and perhaps Diokles' lost *Thyestes*; thus allows Atreus to orchestrate the performance of Thyestes' tragic demise as his own comic happy ending.

In sum, the Thyestean fragments of Aristophanes' *Proagon* parody the teknophagy myth by emphasising the gruesome physical comedy of cooking and eating children as animals. To achieve this, Aristophanes combines the mundane with the mythical: Thyestes eats specific, prepared meat from his children like a comic gourmand, his colloquial cursing (ἐς κόρακας) provides dramatic irony, and his alleged cannibalism causes toilet trouble. In metageneric terms, Aristophanes plays on the audience's familiarity with Thyestes' story as a tragedy to invert tragic *pathos* to comic *bathos*. Thyestes' emotional gut reaction would have been horrific in tragedy, but is diminished to toilet humour and undermined by the comic paunch. His 'taste' (ἐγευσάμην) of the children reduces the tragic use of the verb taste to mean 'to sample a punishment' to its literal meaning 'to eat', asserting the comic preoccupation with food, and his refusal to look on pig snout suggests a parody of a tragic recognition scene.⁹⁵

As a result, Aristophanes' *Proagon* provides compelling circumstantial evidence for how parody of tragedy could incorporate teknophagy into comedy. Although in Aristophanes' case Thyestes' feast provided jokes in a play about tragedies rather than framing the overall plot of the comedy, it illustrates how inseparable the myth of Thyestes' feast is from the tragic genre. When we compare

⁹⁵ Nb. gastronomic comedy occurs in paraepic mythic burlesques, see Revermann (2014), 102-8.

Aristophanes' example to the title of Diokles' *Thyestes* B, it suggests a sustained engagement with the Thyestes myth, drawing on Sophokles' three *Thyestes* plays, including the feast, and Euripides' *Thyestes*, which was based on the feast. The little evidence we have argues that Diokles' *Thyestes* was not simply a mythic burlesque, in that it followed a mythic plot, but perhaps also a *komoidotragoedia* that travestied the tragic scenes and devices that Aristophanes had parodied. What we can conclude with greater certainty is that Aristophanes' paratragedy in *Proagon* influenced the feast in Seneca's *Thyestes*, suggesting that comic adaptations of myth shaped later tragedies.

Conclusion

Having examined all of the surviving fragments of the Tereus and Thyestes comedies, it is clear that the teknophagy featured in all of them and was made light of. Though it is more difficult to pinpoint exactly how the teknophagy was mocked, Aristophanes' parody of the tragic precedents in his *Proagon* and *Birds* respectively provides a useful gauge, in that the *Proagon* features Thyestean jokes in a comedy about promoting tragedy and in that the Tereus of *Birds* identifies himself as Sophoclean. Where Aristophanes parodies tragic features such as elevated diction and the recognition scene in a non-mythic setting, the mythic burlesques also mock tragic diction and invert *pathos* to *bathos* in order to travesty myth.

However the mythic plots of the Thyestes and Tereus burlesques demand a greater degree of comic interaction between tragic characters than Aristophanes presents in his comedies. There is no evidence for how this dynamic may have worked in Diokles' *Thyestes*, but both Kantharos' and Anaxandrides' *Tereus* present a comic battle of the sexes, which Thyestes' fraternal feud could not have provided.

Whereas in *Birds* Aristophanes had inverted audience expectations by presenting Prokne and Tereus as honeymooners, the mythic burlesques include the sexual objectification of Philomela in Anaxandrides fr.46-8 and Kantharos fr.4-5; thus allude to Tereus' rape. Whilst Aristophanes had not only normalised cannibalism as carnivorousness but also deferred it to Peisetairos' wedding feast rather than Tereus' marital breakdown, the burlesques show a feast amongst the tragic characters themselves in Anaxandrides fr.46 and Philetairos fr.15. So the marital problems of Prokne and Tereus, alongside the resolution of the metamorphosis that is apparent in Sophokles' tragedy, provide a feast episode that allows for food-and sex-based humour in mythic burlesque.

Nonetheless both the indirect evidence for Diokles' *Thyestes* in Aristophanes' *Proagon* and the extant *Tereus* fragments of Anaxandrides and Philetairos refer to the butchery or offal of children. Much of the comedy we find in the fragments suggest a visceral representation of the feasts, though we cannot determine whether they were reported or staged. Ultimately the mythic burlesques of Thyestes and Tereus are tragicomic because they travesty the tragic plot and performance modes in order to distance teknophagy as a fantasy and exploit the visceral gore of the cannibalism by integrating it into a comic feast. Though this tragicomic tradition is now fragmentary, the overlap between Aristophanes' paratragic *Proagon* and Seneca's *Thyestes* highlight the potential influence of tragicomedies on later classical tragedy.

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