III NEW COMEDY AND MENANDER

After Aristophanes' *Wealth* (388), our next complete surviving comedy is Menander's *Dyskolos* from 316: a gap longer than the period spanned by our entire corpus of surviving tragedy. The lost lifetime of 'Middle Comedy' is far from a desert; though papyrus texts are scarce, quotations in later Greek texts are very numerous, with Athenaeus' ten-book dialogue *Deipnosophistae* or 'Dinner-Party Scholars' (c. 200 AD) a particularly rich source of snippets concerned with all aspects of food, drink, and the symposium – themes which, even allowing for Athenaeus' specialized interests, seem to have been unusually prominent in the comedy of the era.[65] The relatively abundant fragments and titles fall tantalizingly short of allowing us to trace the evolution of the genre in detail, but it is clear that, by the time Menander began producing in 320 BC, the form and character of comedy had changed, and the long development of Athenian comedy had more or less stabilized. We do not see much further change over the course of Menander's career or in the surviving remains of plays from the following generation, and the plays of New Comedy, even the extant Menander, largely resist attempts at specific dating.

The sheer complexity of fourth-century comedy's development can only be fleetingly glimpsed in the surviving remains of the many fragmentary poets known from this era. The *Suda* lexicon credits **Anaxandrides**, one of a new breed of immigrant poets of non-Athenian birth, as the first to introduce love affairs and rapes of virgins into comedy, a claim we have seen also made for Aristophanes' *Cocalus*; the rival claims can be reconciled by supposing that Anaxandrides was the first to transfer these originally tragic plot motifs from mythological to contemporary settings.[66] But, in any case, some such route of transmission of plot motifs seems to underlie comedy's espousal of plots of deception and mistaken identity, since the era of 'Middle Comedy' was a golden age for mythological comedy, as fourth-century vases confirm; of nearly sixty titles attested for **Eubulus**, half are mythological, and Plautus' *Amphitruo* shows us how one of the favourite storylines of the era would play out in practice. The massively prolific **Antiphanes** was credited in antiquity with

[65] Wilkins 2001.

[66] So Webster 1970: 77, cf. Arnott 1972a; Nesselrath 1990: 195 was sceptical, but he has since (1993) come around.

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between 260 and 365 plays; if these figures are anything like correct, he must have been an early exploiter of the growing market for comedy outside Athens. A giant of the age was the long-lived **Alexis**, whose *Carthaginian* may have been the original for Plautus' *Poenulus*, and who was already winning prizes a quarter-century before Menander's debut and still managed to outlive him by nearly two decades; ancient tradition claimed a close personal association between the two, with Alexis as the younger poet's teacher or even uncle. Menander's older Athenian contemporary **Timocles** is a particularly fascinating figure, not least for the surprisingly high proportion of personal abuse in the fragments, at a time when we would otherwise imagine it virtually extinct; he is an instructive embarrassment to simplistic linear and evolutionary models of fourth-century comedy's development.[67]

The ancient triad of supreme poets of New Comedy – corresponding to the Old Comic trinity of Cratinus, Eupolis, and Aristophanes, and the tragic canon of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides – bracketed the Athenian Menander with two foreign-born contemporaries. **Diphilus**, from the Black Sea city of Sinope, is of particular interest as the source of several plays adapted by Plautus and Terence, though it is difficult to form an overall impression of his distinctiveness from the fragments and titles. **Philemon**, from Syracuse or possibly Soli, was another suspiciously long-lived figure; Apuleius' comment (*Florida* 16) that he avoided plots of sexual impropriety is borne out by the known Latin adaptations *Mercator* and *Trinummus*. From the generation after Menander, the most important were the Macedonian-born **Posidippus** and the strikingly Menandrean **Apollodorus** of Carystus, who was twice adapted into Latin by Terence.

Middle and New Comedy: the main authors

Name	Known dates	Extant Roman versions
Anaxandrides	first victory 376	
Eubulus	first victory c. 370	
Antiphanes	first play 385	
Alexis	c. 375 – c. 275	Plautus, *Poenulus* (?)
Timocles	fl. 320	

[67] On these poets and 'Middle Comedy' generally see especially Nesselrath 1990, and further 1993, 1995; the editions of Eubulus by Hunter (1983) and of Alexis by Arnott (1996); and, for the vase-painting evidence, Taplin 1993, 2007.

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Name	Known dates	Extant Roman versions	
Philemon	c. 365 – c. 265	Plautus,	*Mercator*
			Trinummus
			?*Mostellaria*
Diphilus	c. 355 – c. 295	Plautus,	*Casina*
			Rudens
			Vidularia (?)
		Terence,	*Adelphoe* (one scene only)
Menander	342 – c. 293	Plautus,	*Bacchides*
			Cistellaria
			Stichus
		Terence,	*Adelphoe*
			Andria
			Eunuchus
			Heautontimorumenos
Posidippus	first victory 288		
Apollodorus	first play c. 285	Terence,	*Hecyra*
			Phormio

The distinctive profile of New Comedy as we see it from Menander and his Roman adapters is most easily understood as the hybrid product of three elements: (i) surviving elements from earlier comedy itself, extending back to Aristophanes and the fifth century; (ii) the increasing influence of tragedy, whose conventions have in some cases supplanted those of earlier comedy; and (iii) the design and organization of the fourth-century theatre, which has affected the fundamental shape of both genres in performance.

In two important respects the comedy of Menander's age is the direct heir of its fifth-century ancestor. The language is still that of everyday Attic speech, albeit cast into artificial verse dialogue forms; and the plays are still set in the contemporary world of the audience's own time, featuring fictional characters and storylines in real-world settings. But there are important differences in the way these defining features of the comic tradition are used. The dialogue is much more strictly naturalistic, closer than ever to the cadences of everyday speech – but without Old Comedy's freedom to range more widely across the stylistic spectrum. Both the element of obscenity and the verbal fireworks have been eliminated; there are no rude words in Menander, and none of the exuberant comic wordplay that characterizes Aristophanic poetry. Instead, we find a brilliant distillation of contemporary speech patterns into iambic verse – right down to the

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unfinished sentences, incoherent syntax, and favourite phrases or personal habits of expression that characterize different individuals' ways of speaking. It is a similar story with the settings: so scrupulously real-world are the settings that the element of fantasy has now been entirely banished. There are no suspensions of natural logic or causality, unless we count the laws of coincidence – no more flying to heaven on the backs of giant dung-beetles, or founding cities of cuckoos in the clouds. The most we can expect is for a god to sneak out on stage, tragedy-fashion, to speak the prologue when nobody else is around. Also lost is the element of topical satire; Athens under Macedonian rule was a politically volatile and dangerous place, and Menander does not take the risk of commenting on charged contemporary history. One early play, *Samia*, includes a couple of brief jokes about living individuals, but even this last vestige of comedy's satirical edge has vanished in the later plays.

Many of these changes are the direct result of the increased influence of tragedy. Old and Middle Comedy had both experimented sporadically with mythological settings and storylines (sometimes based on particular tragic plots), but this flirtation with myth was over by Menander's day. What *had* proved influential, however, were tragedy's approaches to character, staging, and plot. Despite some memorable leading roles, Aristophanes could not be accused of an overdeveloped interest in characterization. But, in Menander, the depiction of character in all its complexity and nuance is a major dramatic value, and Menander goes further still than tragedy in trying to make individual motivation and personality intelligible to the audience through the language characters use. Menander recognized that, free of tragedy's heightened and artificial poetic diction, comedy was able to present real people with even greater fidelity and naturalism than had ever been possible in tragedy.

Meanwhile, one of the most startling changes in New Comedy is the abandonment of Old Comedy's freer stage conventions for the austere literalism of tragedy. In New Comedy, there are now no scene changes, no time-jumps, and no breaches of dramatic illusion beyond a very occasional second-person address to the audience (as 'gentlemen', *andres*). As in tragedy, everything takes place in real time, in a single location, and in a world that pretends to exist on the other side of a one-way window to the audience. Again New Comedy actually goes beyond tragedy in the devices it uses to sustain this pretence: characters will sometimes enter in mid-conversation, or address remarks to an unseen interlocutor inside the stage building. But

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perhaps the greatest debt to tragedy is the new kind of comic plot. It is to Menander that we owe the western comic tradition's reliance on ridiculously convoluted, coincidence-heavy, farcical plots centred on misunderstandings (especially of identity). Yet Menander did not invent this kind of plotting; all he did was give a comic spin to a long-established pattern of recognition plotting stretching all the way back to the *Odyssey*, and long established in recognition tragedies such as Euripides' *Ion* and *Helen*. Indeed, it is probably because of Menander's success in stamping such plots with a comic copyright that the selection of surviving tragedies, made in an age when Menander was already a classic, strictly avoided all such plays (which survive only among the Euripidean 'alphabeticals'), despite their continuing prominence as late as Aristotle's *Poetics*.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute everything that is new in New Comedy to the influence of tragedy. One of the major changes between Aristophanes and Menander was in the form of the Athenian theatre itself, and there were also important changes in the way that theatrical performances were funded and organized. These were changes that affected fourth-century tragedy and comedy alike but, since the tragedy of this period has largely disappeared, it can easily look as if the developments were peculiar to comedy. No doubt some of the changes in stage design, in particular, were a response to developments in the plays themselves, rather than an unexplained external development to which the plays had to adapt. Nevertheless, it is helpful to group all these features together, particularly as they emerge most directly to our view in the major rebuilding of the Athenian theatre itself that took place from the 360s to the 330s BC, with its last phase associated with the statesman and orator Lycurgus.

First, the theatre in which Menander produced his plays had three doors instead of one – so the stage building now represents not a single house but a section out of a terraced street. The central door was larger than the two flanking ones, and tended to encourage its use to represent a shrine of a god rather than a private house. A play did not have to use all three doors, but no play by Menander uses fewer than two. This not only changes the dramatic emphasis – from one family's story to the interactions between two or more – but vastly increases the possibilities for complication and confusion in the movements of characters on and off stage (and their options for activity offstage). In particular, Menandrean comedy likes to use the movements of characters between different stage houses to express the

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relationships of estrangement and reconciliation between family members.[68]

Second, in the Hellenistic theatre the solo actors performed on a high platform stage a dozen feet or more above the level of the chorus down in the *orchestra*. As well as marking the increased prominence of the solo actor in this period, it enforced a total separation of actors and chorus, by preventing the kind of free movement between *orchestra* and stage building that had been normal in fifth-century tragedy and comedy. The result was that the chorus was effectively barred from even the limited involvement in the action of the play that they enjoyed in later tragedy. By Menander's time, the two-hundred-year struggle between actors and chorus for control of the play has finally been won, and not by the chorus. The chorus now only show themselves at all when the stage is empty of actors; and the songs they sing have nothing to do with the play, and were probably not even composed specifically for the production. In the papyri, the chorus is no longer part of the script at all; in its place is the one-word stage direction *CHOROU* ('[song] of the chorus'), already familiar from Aristophanes' last plays, to mark where the chorus would have performed one of its numbers.

Third, there was a standardization of theatrical resources. The fourth century was a time of straitened finances: Athens was no longer a wealthy imperial power, and the reserves of private wealth on which fifth-century drama had depended for funding no longer existed. By Menander's time, performances of tragedy and comedy were entirely funded by the state, which led to a standardization of budget and resources in the areas that had traditionally been most expensive. Thus, the chorus of a tragedy or comedy was now allocated precisely four songs per play, no more, no less – which meant that all plays now had a consistent structure of five dialogue episodes separated by the four choral songs, the origin of the five-act structure so persistent in the western classical tradition of theatre. The number of solo actors, which in Aristophanes' time could be as many as five, was now frozen at its tragic norm of three; and it appears that even the range of character masks was restricted, with the same masks (and their associated character names) turning up in play after play. Certainly we notice a striking tendency to work in character *stereotypes*, with a highly artificial system of character names, masks, and traits that rather belies the general tendency to naturalistic individual characterization. A slave

[68] More on this in N. J. Lowe 2000a: 191–6.

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called Daos in one play is not the same actual individual as a slave called Daos in another; but they probably looked the same, and raised similar broad expectations in the audience of the kind of personality beneath, which it was then up to the writer of the particular play to refine in what this particular slave-called-Daos said or did.

The kind of theatre that emerges from this complex fusion of different influences and traditions is so instantly recognizable and familiar as the ancestor of the classical tradition in western comedy, with its naturalistic but complicated plots of cross purposes and mistaken identity, that it is easy to underestimate its historical significance and artistry. These finely observed domestic comedies of manners were a breakthrough in theatrical technique, and the most daring experiments that the Greek language ever conducted in trying to make poetry from the fabric of everyday speech. The innovative distillation of everyday Attic speech patterns, and the subtlety with which he uses this to delineate the speech and thought patterns of individual characters, were two of the qualities most admired by Menander's ancient enthusiasts. It is this linguistic and psychological naturalism that Menander's most influential advocate, the second-century scholar and critic Aristophanes of Byzantium, was commending in his famous *mot* on Menander's realism.

But Menander's drama is also the first major literary product of the new world of the early Hellenistic era, in which democracy is dead, the shape of the Greek world has been changed forever by Alexander's eastern conquests, and theatre has to address itself to a new political order under which Athens is an occupied state and the international situation is inherently violent and unstable. What Menander's plays focus on, with great subtlety and insight, is therefore not the transient world of external politics but the institutions that define Greek society as a whole. For Menander, this is a hierarchy of three levels of citizen identity: the individual, the *oikos* or family unit of which he or she is an element, and the wider *polis* community of other such families in interaction. Outside all of these is the wider Greek world of other *poleis*, but that is an inherently dangerous and unstable world, and the plays are mainly concerned with the conflicts or coincidences of duty and interest between these three levels of all Greeks' sense of their place in their world. Not coincidentally, it is a set of themes that a naturalistic comedy of domestic life, set against the background of an ordinary city street, is peculiarly well equipped to explore. However, this concern with the institutional foundations of Greekness – in particular, with *polis*-based models of citizenship – is also a response

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to the vast expansion in the geographical and cultural compass of the Greek world after Alexander.

For Menander lived in interesting times. Born in or around 342, he was a child at the time of Athens' decisive defeat by Philip of Macedon at Chaeronea in 338, and grew up under the uneasy accommodation with Macedon that held after Philip's assassination and the accession of Alexander. When Alexander died in June 323, Athens took advantage of the political chaos to revolt against Macedonian rule, only to be forced into unconditional surrender the following year. The city was garrisoned under an oligarchic regime led by Demades and Phocion, and the anti-Macedonian orator-statesmen Demosthenes and Hyperides met grim deaths in the ensuing purge. It was against this turbulent background that the teenage Menander found himself serving his two-year term of military training as an *ephebe* – alongside the future philosopher Epicurus – and it was during this service that he found time to write his debut play *Orge* ('Anger'), which was staged in or around 321. Demades was executed on Macedonian orders in 319, and a short-lived restoration of democracy the following year ended when the city was starved into surrender a few months later and placed under the rule of the puppet philosopher-king Demetrius of Phalerum, who became a friend and supporter of the young Menander; *Dyskolos* was produced in 316, in the early months of Demetrius' regime. This regime lasted ten years, and then, in 307, the Antigonid prince Demetrius Poliorcetes 'liberated' Athens from Macedonian rule; Demetrius of Phalerum fled to Alexandria, and Menander himself is said to have narrowly escaped death. After Demetrius Poliorcetes' defeat in the battle of Ipsus (301), a notionally independent government took charge under Phaedrus of Sphettus; but intrigue and violence continued with an internal coup in the early 290s suppressed by the pro-Macedonian Lachares, who then installed himself as tyrant of Athens and was overthrown in turn by Demetrius Poliorcetes, who besieged Athens into a second surrender in 295. At the time of Menander's death, Athens was once more under a puppet oligarchy supported by the Macedonian king – none other than Demetrius Poliorcetes, to whom the Macedonian throne had now fallen.

Reflections of this turbulent world in the plays are subtle but significant.[69] Such a volatile political climate was hardly hospitable to the

[69] Major 1997 argues for an essentially pro-Macedonian stance, Lape 2004 against; it is not clear that one of them has to be wrong.

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kind of pungent topical debate that we see in Aristophanes, which had in any case long since fallen from fashion; early plays such as *Samia* can be seen to make brief satirical mention of named contemporary figures, but the satire is blandly apolitical. Nevertheless, the unnerving instability of the wars of Alexander's successors is reflected strongly in many aspects of Menander's plays. The world beyond the *polis* is a violent, lawless, and unstable one, in which Greeks are routinely raped, enslaved, and traded by other Greeks; in which the principal opportunity available to ambitious young men is a dangerous and often short life as a mercenary soldier in the eastern wars, and such wealthy mercenaries are typically characterized in the plays as violent, unpredictable, and prone to irrational rages. Ordinary citizens are politically disempowered, their sphere of social operation confined to the family; there is recognition now that the structures of power are largely centred outside the home community, and that the world beyond it has grown larger and more complex and threatening. Yet, at the same time, there is a near-utopian pride in the orderliness of the *polis* and the power of its laws and values to sustain the happiness of its citizens. Though the democratic constitution is by now a thing of the past, the civic ideology it fostered lingers on, and Menander's world is still in many key respects the world of the orators: obsessively anxious over legal issues of citizenship, paternity, and inheritance; clinging to a utopian nostalgia for city-state autonomy and cohesion in a world where these values are increasingly under threat from the new geopolitical order.

Significantly, all Menander's known plays are love stories. This was not by any means the universal practice of his rivals, but Menander has a particular fondness for stories of citizen love, culminating in a happy marriage legally agreed between families belonging to the same city. Some of the reason for this is no doubt sentimental, an early sign of the new prominence in the Hellenistic poets of love as a subject of emotional and psychological appeal in its own right. But Menander is as much interested in citizenship and marriage as in love, because marriage is *the* defining transaction between citizen families. Marriage is what allows the family, and the *polis* as a whole, to perpetuate itself. In Athens, and no doubt elsewhere, there was enormous anxiety over issues of citizenship and legitimacy – something we see reflected especially in the large body of surviving law-court speeches on cases of disputed citizen status. In Menander, and in Greek family life, marriage was about more than the romantic feelings of a boy and a girl; this is why many of the plays involve tensions between the

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inclinations of individual lovers and their responsibilities to the family or the law. That they are ultimately resolved is a way of assuring the audience that they do indeed live, as Greeks in Greek cities, in the best of all possible worlds.

At the same time, at the heart of Menander's comedy lies a subtle, coherent, and sophisticated philosophical system. Menander associated with philosophers – tradition has it that he studied with Aristotle's successor Theophrastus, did his military service with the young Epicurus, and was a personal friend of the Athenian ruler and essayist Demetrius of Phalerum – and his ethical thinking in particular was clearly influenced by Aristotle and his school. Like Aristotle and the other founders of the major Hellenistic philosophical schools, he presents a view of the world in which morality is not something mysterious or supernatural; in which there are systematic, intelligible, and practical rules that anyone can implement every day of their lives, and in so doing make not only their own lives but those of others appreciably happier and more just. A key concept is that encapsulated in the Greek word *philanthropia*, 'love of people' or 'human feeling': a sensitivity to other people's concerns alongside or ahead of one's own. Again and again in the plays, characters are rewarded for selflessness, for putting the feelings of others before their own interests, and for readiness to admit their own moral failings in preference to judging others by harsher standards. Menander's plays are full of the virtues of forgiveness, generosity, and recognition of the importance of family and community. If, at the end, love conquers all, it is not merely because the Hellenistic world shows a new inclination to sentimental escapism (though that is certainly a factor), but because it is the key to a sophisticated, philosophically informed, yet also practical, way of understanding the human world.

Menander: individual plays

The conventional wisdom that Menander did not survive in a medieval manuscript tradition was turned on its head in 2004 with the discovery of the Vatican palimpsest, recycled from a fourth-century codex whose surviving portions contain parts of *Dyskolos* and *Titthe* as part of what may have been quite a substantial and capacious luxury edition – even, it has been optimistically suggested, a *Complete Works*. But it still seems that Menander stopped being copied at an early date and, until the 1890s, his works were known only from (i) the highly

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creative and free Roman adaptations of Plautus and Terence, and (ii) short quotations preserved in later Greek authors (so-called 'book quotations'). The bulk of our modern text derives from two remarkable papyri: the Cairo codex, published in 1908 and delivering parts of *Heros*, *Perikeiromene*, *Samia*, and *Epitrepontes*; and the Bodmer codex, published from 1959, which gave us *Dyskolos* complete, the beginning of *Aspis*, and a crucial further chunk of *Samia*. Later finds have also given us substantial parts of *Sikyonios/oi* and *Misoumenos*. We now have *Dyskolos* all but intact; more than half of *Samia* and *Epitrepontes*; substantial amounts (sufficient to reconstruct the full plot) of *Aspis*, *Perikeiromene*, *Sikyonios/oi*, and *Misoumenos*; and scenes from a dozen or so more. Dating is not easy, but *Dyskolos* took first prize at the City Dionysia in 316; *Samia* seems on formal grounds to be a work of the same general era, while *Epitrepontes* probably belongs in the 290s.

In cases below where it seems helpful – which also includes all of Terence, but none of Plautus – I include diagrams of the structure of familial and/or romantic relationships among the principal citizen characters in their relation to the stage houses (indicated by a grey square), including relationships not known to some or all of the characters. Dotted lines indicate relationships imagined, feared, or provisionally endorsed by the characters that must turn out to be superseded by a more appropriate configuration. The orientation of left and right has been determined by the need for graphical clarity and should not be taken as indicating which house was on which side of the stage (especially in the case of *Dyskolos*, where the text in fact seems to put Cnemon's house on the left). It may be useful to bear in mind that the central event of a Greek wedding was the transfer of the bride from the house of her father or other male guardian (*kyrios*) to the house of her husband, and that a divorce would reverse the process; and that Menander's dramatic world-model is built around a three-tier view of society, in which the individual's identity is defined against the successive hierarchical levels of *oikos* (family/household), *polis*, and wider Hellenistic *oikoumene*. Theatrically, these are typically represented by the individual actor's movements between the stage doors (*oikos*), the urban side-entrance (*polis*), and the opposite harbour exit, if available (accessing the world overseas, though this features mainly as a negative force).

Dyskolos ('**Miserable**').[70] The misanthropic title character, Cnemon, has settled his household in the remote mountain village of

[70] Besides the edition of Handley (1965) and Sandbach's commentary in Gomme and

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Phyle in an attempt to maximize his isolation from the urban community; but his quest for self-sufficiency proves his undoing when a complex chain of divinely engineered synchronicities leads to his being trapped down a well in his own backyard, only to be rescued by his daughter's feckless urban suitor and the estranged stepson whom his lifestyle has condemned to poverty (Figure 5).

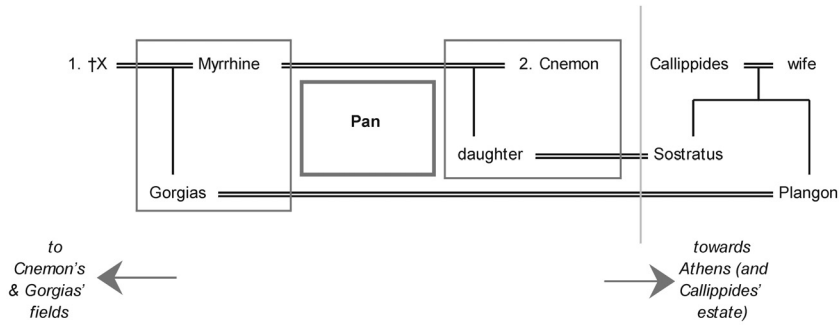


Figure 5

Dyskolos is a theatrically expansive play, with a large cast, spectacular use of props, mutes, and animals, and the only use of all three stage doors in extant Menander. Over the course of the play, the reunification of Cnemon's broken family and the continuation of his line through a double marriage with a wealthy city family is played out by the gradual funnelling of the entire cast into one great party in the central shrine of Pan, the all-controlling god unseen by any but the audience. An exceptionally complex family structure – Gorgias is Cnemon's stepson by his estranged wife's first husband – creates a legally tensioned relationship, since Gorgias must be formally adopted in order to inherit, and has no jurisdiction over his sister's welfare when he sees her apparently eyed up by what he takes to be a sexual predator. An important tragic intertext is Euripides' *Electra*, which similarly explores the uneasy relationship between rich and poor members of the same social class, and, as usual, the distance between the tragic and comic worlds is measured by the success of civic and ethical principles in averting the spectres of tragic possibility feared by the characters.

Sandbach 1973, see Arnott 1964a; Ramage 1966; Sherk 1968; Keuls 1969; Post 1969; M. Anderson 1970; Zagagi 1979, 1994: 95–113; Wiles 1984; N. J. Lowe 1987; Dedoussi 1988a; Brown 1992; Ireland 1995; Haegemans 2001; Lape 2001; Rosivach 2001; Traill 2001; Cox 2002a, 2002b.

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Samia (‘**The Samian Girl**’).[71] Embarrassed to confess to his adoptive father, Demeas, that he has raped and impregnated the neighbour’s daughter during both fathers’ absence abroad, the young man Moschion conceals the truth by passing off the resulting baby as Demeas’ child by his Samian mistress; but Demeas wrongly infers that Moschion has seduced the mistress himself (Figure 6).

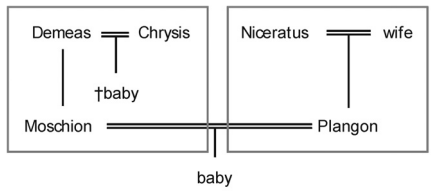


Figure 6

In contrast to *Dyskolos*, *Samia* is an extremely tight, minimalist play whose key action takes place entirely in the characters’ heads, as Moschion’s initial offence escalates in the imagination of the two old men into a deeper outrage, of which the original offender remains both innocent and innocently unaware. The play’s fourth act is the crown jewels of Menandrean comedy so far recovered; it is instructive to compare early attempts at reconstruction, based on the parts of the play known since 1908 from the Cairo codex, with the magnificent scene of farcical cross purposes revealed by the Bodmer papyrus in 1969. But the play is also a subtle exploration of the tensions created by the Athenian institutions of adoption and concubinage within a typically Menandrean non-nuclear family unit, using intertextual intimations of tragedy (especially Euripides’ *Hippolytus*) to establish a disturbing alternate reality in which the nightmare of a taboo sexual relationship, between a young stepmother and a stepson of similar age, is finally dispelled by the revelation that nothing untoward has happened beyond a rape that is itself generically healed by its transformation into married love and the propagation of the *oikos*. Moschion’s reluctance to confront his father with the truth stems from a sense of an unrepayable debt: as he explains in the prologue, everything that defines him as a citizen is the result of Demeas’ gift through his adoption of a non-blood heir as a socially acceptable alternative to marriage. In the final act, father and son recognize that the bond imposes a duty of trust in both directions.

[71] W. S. Anderson 1972; Lloyd-Jones 1972; Bain 1983; Grant 1986a; Groton 1987; Dedoussi 1988b; Zagagi 1988, 1994: 113–41; Lamagna 1998; Cusset 2000; Blanchard 2002.

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Epitrepontes (‘**The Arbitrants**’).[72] Learning that his new bride is pregnant with a rapist’s child, Charisius leaves his wife and attempts to return to a bachelor life, while his father-in-law, Smicrines, attempts to recover his daughter’s dowry before it is all spent on partying; but the exposed baby survives, and a dispute over the recognition tokens found with it is arbitrated by Smicrines in a way that ultimately leads to the identification of the rapist as none other than Charisius himself (Figure 7).

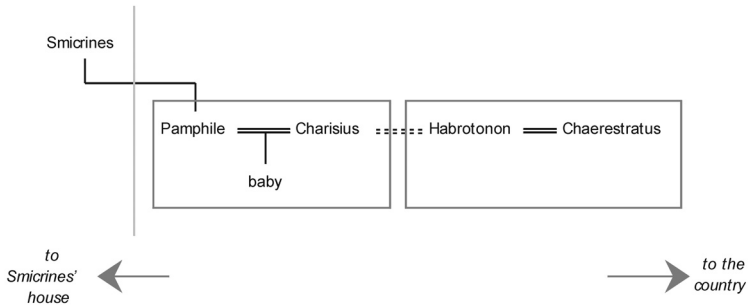


Figure 7

This major play is theatrically a counterpart of *Dyskolos*, with Charisius’ young family torn apart as, one by one, its members are displaced from the family house under whose roof they must finally be united. First the baby is exposed; then Charisius himself moves out to seek consolation with the party-girl Habrotonon next door (to the consternation of his friend Chaerestratus, who has fallen for her himself); and finally Pamphile herself is put under pressure by her father, Smicrines, to abandon the marriage and return with her dowry. This has the effect of bringing her as far as the street door but no further: precisely where she needs to be in order both for Charisius to overhear her moving protestations of loyalty, and for Habrotonon to identify her visually as the victim of the festival rape. The moral ironies are strongly drawn, with the stingy Smicrines and the feckless Charisius both driven to learn the difference between preaching and practice. Smicrines unwittingly settles the fate of his grandson in advocating to the disputants at arbitration a generosity he fails to observe towards his own daughter; Charisius high-handedly blames his wife for being the victim of rape while feeling no scruple about

[72] W. S. Anderson 1982; Arnott 1987, 2004; Stockert 1997; Martina 1997–2000; Nünlist 1999, 2003; Porter 1999–2000; Iversen 2001.

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having himself been an actual perpetrator, and it is vital to our sense of his eventual moral re-education that he repents and takes her back *before* the revelation that her child is his after all. Menander's close student Apollodorus admired these ironies, and constructed round the same bizarre situation a very different plot with an even tighter human structure: the play we know as Terence's *Hecyra*.

Aspis (**'The Shield'**).[73] When young Cleostratus is apparently killed in battle, his greedy uncle Smicrines tries to exploit the legal status of Cleostratus' orphaned sister to get his hands on the family fortune. Cleostratus' slave Daos seeks to thwart Smicrines' scheme by faking a second family tragedy, only for Cleostratus to turn up alive at the most bewildering moment possible.[74] The title refers to the spectacular procession of Cleostratus' captives and treasure across the stage, past the seething Smicrines' own door, and into his brother's house instead. Most of what survives comes from the first three acts, though we are fortunate to have key fragments of the priceless moment when the deceased turns up at another dead man's door, only for each to discover the other alive (Figure 8).

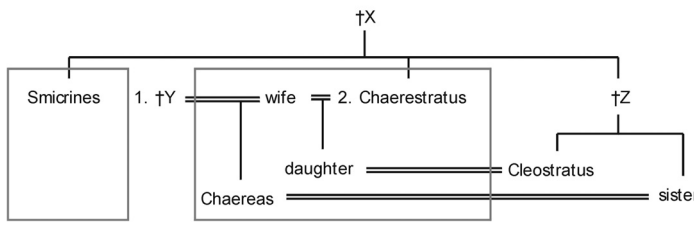


Figure 8

Menander's most elaborate legal plot is centred on the Athenian institution under which a female orphan (who could not inherit in her own right) would be attached to her late *kyrios*'s estate as an *epikleros* or 'testatory residue' and in that capacity married off to her nearest eligible male relative, who would inherit the estate as part of the package. Some details of the intricate plan, which is hatched by the one surviving Menandrean prototype of the Roman cunning slave, suggest that either Menander is alluding to legal nuances otherwise

[73] Lloyd-Jones 1971; MacDowell 1982; Brown 1983; Jacques 1998; Borgogno 2002; Beroutsos 2005.

[74] The diagram shows Webster's reconstruction (1974: 123), under which Chaereas and Chaerestratus' daughter are *homometrioi*, children of the same mother – which would still allow them to marry under Attic law. Others avoid this by taking Chaerestratus' present marriage to be his second, with his daughter born to his first wife; so Sandbach in his commentary (1973).

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unknown or he is simply taking liberties with the strict letter of the law – though the plays generally seem to assume as high a level of legal competence as the orators, and we too easily forget the effect on mass culture of widespread experience of service on the large and numerous popular juries. MacDowell's view (1982) that the law on *epikleroi* is being criticized probably mistakes the ideological function of Menandrean comedy, which, as usual, here shows that citizen law produces the desired civic outcome even when ill-meaning characters try to use it to achieve exactly the opposite.

Perikeiromene (**'The Girl Cropped Short'**).[75] Hot-tempered soldier Polemon punishes his mistress Glycera by cutting off her hair, having misunderstood as flirtation with a stranger what is in fact her attempt to discover whether the stranger is her long-lost brother. This recognition comedy is one of three plays that explore the type-character of the professional mercenary soldier, thought of as being emotionally incontinent and prone to anger and violence, though only Polemon conforms to this type in truth. The bold opening sequence is lost, but it presented Polemon's version of events, and its consequence, before the goddess Ignorance (*Agnoia*) came on to explain the truth in a delayed prologue. Glycera's dilemma is that she cannot reveal her identity to Moschion without also revealing his own secret: that he, like her, is a foundling and his claim to citizenship is therefore in question unless his father can be found (which of course he quickly is).

Misoumenos (**'The Object of her Hatred'**).[76] The soldier Stratonides appears to have killed his mistress Crateia's brother; now she shuns him and her hostility drives him to despair. Menander's most paradoxical soldier character opens the play with a soliloquy lamenting the effects of his emasculation by love, which has turned him out of his own house in the middle of the night on the wish of a mere slave. A series of dramatic recognitions, triggered in turn by the brother's captured sword, eventually brings Stratophanes to confront what both he and Crateia believe to be the truth about her brother, and (probably) to surrender her to her newly discovered father – only to receive her back joyfully, not now as a slave but as a citizen wife legally bestowed by her father, when the *Aspis*-like misunderstanding is cleared up.

[75] Extended discussions are few, but, in addition to Goldberg 1980, see Konstan 1987.
[76] Webster 1973; Turner 1977; Giacomoni 1998.

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Sikyoniosloi (‘**The Sicyonian[s]**’).[77] Despite the near-total loss of the play’s first half, we can see that this was a remarkable recognition play of many convergent strands and elaborate doublings. The soldier Stratophanes pursues Philumene, once his property but now barred from him both by her claim of Athenian citizen birth and her sanctuary at the Eleusinian altar; his rival Moschion seems, as an Athenian, to have the stronger claim, until Stratophanes learns that he too was Athenian born, and can therefore promote Philumene from slave to wife if only he can track down the parents of both. Stratophanes’ long-lost father is found to be none other than the father of his rival Moschion, and when the unscrupulous parasite Theron goes in pursuit of a bogus witness to Philumene’s parentage, he unwittingly turns up her real father Cichesias – whom Theron believes his supposed stooge is merely impersonating, so that, in a glorious scene of poignant cross purposes, he interprets Cichesias’ real tears and truthful recollections as uncannily convincing simulation.

Bibliographic note

The fullest bibliography of Menander is Katsouris 1995. Editions date rapidly with the arrival of new papyrus finds, but Arnott’s Loeb (1979–2000) is the most complete text to date; Sandbach’s Oxford text (1990) is a good second for most plays, but misses several significant recent discoveries. Translations need to be used with caution: even the benchmark prose version by Miller (1987) has been superseded in places, so that, for *Epitrepontes* and *Misoumenos*, Arnott’s Loeb and Balme’s World’s Classics (2001) are more complete, though neither has the very latest on *Epitrepontes* (for which see Nünlist 2003 and Furley’s forthcoming volume). No translation other than these three should be used for any academic purpose; the Pennsylvania volume (Slavitt and Bovie 1998) in particular needs warning against, since its free translations are themselves liberally supplemented with free invention where the papyri give out, and the shifts between loosely translated and sheerly invented Menander are entirely undocumented. There are few full commentaries in English; the monumental ‘Gomme and Sandbach’ 1973 is mostly Sandbach solo, Gomme having died before the Bodmer papyrus appeared. *Dyskolos* has the authoritative Handley 1965 and a good Aris & Phillips by Ireland (1995); Bain’s

[77] See Lloyd-Jones 1966.

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Samia (1983) in the same series is more austere. Ireland's Bristol *Companion* (1993) to Miller's translation is brief but useful.

The most penetrating critical monographs on Menander are Wiles 1991 (exploring how the performance codes construct and negotiate complex ideological models of the citizen and his world) and Lape 2004 (the fullest analysis of the legal heart of the plays, on which see also Scafuro 1997). The most useful general studies are Blume 1998 and Blanchard 2007; in English, Webster 1974 and Goldberg 1980 remain valuable overviews, with the latter devoting a chapter each to the major texts, and the former including characteristically fascinating, if wildly speculative, reconstructions of many lost plays. Webster's earlier books (notably 1960) are superseded by later papyrus finds, though the very boldness of the chapters on Menander's rivals in Webster 1970 has left them without any significant successor in English. Note also Vogt-Spira 1992, Zagagi 1994 (with an excellent chapter on *Samia*), and Walton and Arnott 1996. Two useful collections of essays are Turner 1969 and Handley and Hurst 1990. On Menander and tragedy, the key works are Katsouris 1975 and Cusset 2003. Frost 1988 is concerned with staging rather than stagecraft, but is still a concise and helpful companion. On women in New Comedy, see the seminal article by Wiles (1989), as well as Henry 1985, Brown 1990, 1993, and Rosivach 1998. Chapters 3 and 5 of Green 1990 offer helpful accounts of the complex Athenian political background to Menander's career – as well as the classic modern statement of the case *against* Menander's ancient estimation.

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