

Menander's Self-advertisement or Life in and out of the Canon

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A character in a New Comedy play speaking his (or, worse yet, her) mind publicly on stage – of necessity in the street where anyone can overhear – does not behave in a natural way. We expect such unnatural elements in the genre to place severe limitations on the psychological depth of portrayals and even on the very artistic intention to portray real life in all its variety. It is then somewhat of a paradox that Menander's characters are so lifelike despite the strange settings in which they move. This is just one of the paradoxes, albeit a symptomatic one, of the genre – beginning with the characters' movements on stage, there are many such points of friction in the genre between strict conventions and a convincing imitation of the irreducible variety of everyday life. In this paper I wish to explore a few of the ways in which Menander takes advantage of the limitations of his genre. Constant exposure to the genre must have dulled the spectators to the most unnatural elements. Besides, without having experienced anything more realistic, many of the artificial elements must have passed completely unnoticed. However, exposure to these dramatic performances must have at the same time increased their desire to see something new and convincing, a plot of adequately intricate nature, that is both plausible (realistic) and original *while at the same time* comfortingly familiar.

Unlike the New Comedy world, real life is unpredictable – things do not always end up as desired or they take too long or completely lack any meaningful resolution. It is normally difficult to understand any particular situation clearly at any given moment without the necessary detachment, dramatic reversals of fortune, or shocking coincidences that would force upon us unexpected truths. This variety defies all attempts at categorization: Philemon (fr. 93 K-A) has an unnamed character commenting in this vein: there are as many types of behaviour as there are men. And while to each animal Prometheus gives a specific code of behaviour (κατὰ γένη φύσιν μίαν 93.3 K-A), men's behaviour cannot be reduced to any simple pattern:

ἡμῶν δ' ὅσα καὶ τὰ σώματ' ἐστὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν
καθ' ἑνός, τοσοῦτους ἔστι καὶ τρόπους ἰδεῖν (Phil. fr. 93.10f. K-A)

To represent such variety to the fullest extent could not have possibly been the artistic goal of any New Comedy playwright and the fact that this sentiment features in *Philemon* should alert us to the possibility that it was exploited for a particular comic effect, perhaps with some dramatic irony intended (and very probably spoken by a stock character). And yet Menander, working in this genre, is known to have been praised as one who *omnem vitae imaginem expressit*.¹ Aristophanes of Byzantium praised him in equally famous words (ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε, πότερος ἄρ' ὑμῶν πότερον ἀπεμιμήσατο; *test.* 83 K-A) and one must therefore conclude that the conventional tools and self-imposed limitations of the genre did not seem to diminish that experience of watching 'real life'.

I shall suggest that (ironically) playing precisely with the stock material of comedy helped Menander achieve not only a sense of novelty but also of something approaching realism. Characters, and situations in which they found themselves, looked comfortingly similar in most plays but Menander could surprise with a touch of unusual individualization, with a clever use of accidents, timing, and variations in tempo that could at any time change the course of action. The messiness of real life became quite easily and economically represented by means of a negation: by a subtle deviation from the stereotypical. A fixed canon of a limited scope has a surprising advantage in that any negation of any of its recognizable elements ultimately seems to hint at the irreducible variety of life. A related option is to invoke some self-enclosed canon – tragedy, for instance – and if one finds in that finite pool of familiar stories anything that resembles a particular situation on stage, the implication is that the finiteness of tragedy compares badly with the implied permutations of real life represented by comedy. In all this, the canon is an essential element in presenting comedy as a mirror of real life.

Such a game must have been of particular interest to the audience: they knew what outcome to expect, what general behaviour would characterize what *dramatis personae*, and so on, but they were constantly kept in the dark about the particulars. The timing, say, or any other surprises in store for them were all built around the spectators' very familiarity with what should come next.

Moreover, if the dual nature of the genre that posed as reality but used stock techniques to represent it is cleverly used, it can allow the playwright effective comments on his art and his own sophistication without disturbing the illusion that

¹ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 10.i.69: '*ita omnem vitae imaginem expressit, tanta in eo inveniendi copia et eloquendi facultas, ita est omnibus rebus personis adfectibus accommodatus.*' Comments on the nature of Menander's realism appear in most studies of the playwright, see e.g. Zagagi (1994) 94ff., Arnott (1968), Del Corno (1996).

his *dramatis personae* speak and act fully in character. This naturally assumes audience participation and its familiarity with the genre. Fourth-century Athenian audiences were certainly exposed to a massive output of new dramas, both comedies and tragedies.² 'Tragedy was never cultivated with more enthusiasm than during the fourth century' and some of the plays gained as much fame as the already canonical fifth-century plays.³ Surely behind the dismissive remarks of the philosophers about the depraved common tastes of the spectators and their negative influence on the contemporary playwrights, there lies an acknowledgment of the spectators' interest in the dramatic productions and lively participation in the dramatic events.⁴ The sheer mass of productions that the audiences were exposed to must have created among them connoisseurs who watched the plays with a certain horizon of expectations.⁵ We have evidence for the increased fondness for theatrical artefacts in the fourth century⁶ and for the growing fame and importance of the actors.⁷ If this was not enough to suggest a serious interest in theatre, then comic parody, literary debates within the plays, and even explicit playing with the concept of writing a play⁸ should alert us to the possibility that technical aspects of the theatre were becoming widely recognized by the spectators even before Menander began his career.

Intensive literary polemic was a feature of both Old and Middle Comedy⁹ and indeed the very competitive context in which much of Greek literature was produced shaped the awareness of strictly defined rules embedded in each particular genre. Competition required a certain technical standard, and comedy (Old and Middle) was particularly prone to appeals to such standards before its audience.

It is naturally difficult to state precisely how widespread the awareness of the technicalities of the dramatic genres was. We have some evidence but it is hardly

² For instance the tragic poet Karkinos is credited with 160 plays, Astydamos with even more (240: Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) 20f.). For the period of Middle Comedy, we have the figure of 617 comedies (Anon. *De comoedia* II 52ff. Kaibel, III 45ff. Koster.) or by a different estimate (Athenaeus 8.336d) over 800. The output of plays by New Comedy playwrights must have been equally vast, with the numbers only for Menander variously given as 105, 108 or 109 (Men. *Test.* 1, 3, 46, and 63.).

³ Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) 20. Cf. Easterling (1993), (1997) 212 with note 6.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Plato *Leg.* 659a-c, Arist. *Poet.* 1451b37, *Pol.* 1341b15. For the discussion of Aristotle's and Plato's views of theatocracy see Wallace (1997) with further references.

⁵ There are many stimulating works in this area. Seminal are Jauss (1982a,b) and Iser (1978).

⁶ Green (1994) 76 ff.

⁷ Arist. *Rh.* 1403b33 claims that actors have gained more power than the playwrights. Wallace (1997) 108.

⁸ Cf. Rosen (2000).

⁹ Oliva (1968).

neutral: ¹⁰ a prologue speaker in Antiphanes' comedy *Poiesis* (fr. 189 K-A) humorously exaggerates when (s)he says a tragic poet has an easy task because it is enough for him to drop a name, say that of Oedipus, and the spectators are sure to know both his family (*dramatis personae*) and the direction a play will take. Not so in the case of comedies, it is argued – the plot has to be thought up anew every single time:

ἡμῖν δὲ ταῦτ' οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ πάντα δεῖ
 εὐρεῖν, ὀνόματα καινὰ, – χ – υ –
 χ – υ – κάπειτα τὰ † διωικημένα
 πρότερον, τὰ νῦν παρόντα, τὴν καταστροφὴν,
 τὴν εἰσβολήν. ἂν ἔν τι τούτων παραλίπηι
 Χρέμης τις ἢ Φεῖδων τις, ἐκσυρίττεται
 Πηλεῖ δὲ πάντ' ἔξεστι καὶ Τεύκρω ποιεῖν (Antiph. fr. 189.17ff. K-A)

On the other hand, Aristotle suggests that even the most famous tragic subjects were known only to a limited number of spectators (*Poet.* 1451b25). Both pronouncements are made within a particular argumentative context and they need not be taken as mutually exclusive.¹¹ Clearly there must have been differences in the perception of theatre and in the spectators' expectations that depended on their individual interests, education, social status and various more elusive elements. Given the differences in the education of the spectators – between, in Aristotle's words, the hired workers, mechanics and the like on the one hand and the educated spectators on the other (cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1342a19ff.), it would indeed be difficult to insist that everyone in the audience recognized, say, an echo of Euripides' *Orestes* in the 'messenger-speech' of Menander's *Sikyonios* (176ff.).¹²

It is probable that not all in the audience were aware of the influence of dramatic tradition on Menander's comedy. On the other hand it must be stressed that to notice at least the repetitiveness of many comic patterns and the typical linguistic

¹⁰ Handley (1989) 160; Oliva (1968) 35-7; Pickard-Cambridge (1988) 275f.

¹¹ Elsewhere (*Rh.* 1416b27), Aristotle claims that some famous stories – he mentions Achilles' deeds – are generally known.

¹² Even though we know that Eur. *Orestes* was a particularly successful play in the fourth century. Cf. Willink (1986) lxiii, Arnott (1986). Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) 28-34 discusses Euripides' popularity in the fourth century. There were, incidentally, poets whose plays were meant to be circulated and read by educated readers (Cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1413b, Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) 8) and they presumably made different requirements on their target audience but it is futile to speculate how reading public influenced other poets whose prime motive was to win a dramatic competition.

signposts when alluding to tragedy requires no great learning. Becoming acquainted with only a couple of New Comedy plays makes one attuned to the genre's familiar settings, characters and resolutions. Some repetitiveness was openly acknowledged: Terence can claim, *without a trace of censure*, that there is no big difference between the *argumentum* of Menander's *Andria* and *Perinthia*:

Menander fecit Andriam et Perinthiam.
qui utramvis recte norit ambas noverit:
non ita dissimili sunt argumento, [s]et tamen
dissimili oratione sunt factae ac stilo. (Ter. *Andria* 9ff.)

Terence selects his evidence for a particular rhetorical effect in his defence against those who find fault with *contaminatio* as his working method. His statement, however, must have struck his spectators as containing a grain of truth if they were to sympathize with his line of argument.¹³

If we consider that Menander wrote over a hundred plays within thirty-odd years of his career – three plays a year on average – we need not doubt that a compromise had to be struck between originality and recycling. In principle Menander probably faced a basic problem: which part to hurry over and which to concentrate on and make stand out. However, even the dramatic shorthands could very economically conceal their staleness and even give a sense of freshness with a few strokes that would turn a particular pattern on its head or tease the spectators with the timing of its execution. The general esthetic attitude had been around for some time:

ήγουμαι δ' οὕτως ἂν μεγίστην ἐπίδοσιν λαμβάνειν καὶ τὰς ἄλλας τέχνας
καὶ τὴν περὶ τοὺς λόγους φιλοσοφίαν, εἴ τις θαυμάζοι καὶ τιμῶη μὴ τοὺς
πρώτους τῶν ἔργων ἀρχομένους, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἄρισθ' ἕκαστον αὐτῶν
ἐξεργαζομένους, μηδὲ τοὺς περὶ τούτων ζητοῦντας λέγειν, περὶ ὧν
μηδεὶς πρότερον εἴρηκεν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς οὕτως ἐπισταμένους εἰπεῖν ὡς
οὐδεὶς ἂν ἄλλος δύναίτο. (Isocr. *Panegyricus* 10)

Aristotle praises Euripides for improving a verse of Aeschylus' with a single word (*Poet.* 1458a18) and this type of literary emulation is wholeheartedly

¹³ Donatus, commenting on line 10, seems to be suggesting something different from Terence. Arnott (1994) 70 warns against taking Terence's words at face value.

embraced by comic poets who frequently appropriated while giving an impression of improving on their models, often Euripides himself. An anonymous comic poet speaking about a line from Euripides' *Orestes* (v. 234) elaborates:

ὁ πρῶτος εἰπὼν “μεταβολὴ πάντων γλυκύ”
 οὐχ ὑγίαινε, δέσποτ’· ἐκ μὲν γὰρ κόπου
 γλυκεῖ’ ἀνάπαυσις, ἐξ ἀλουσίας δ’ ὕδωρ
 ἦν δ’ ἐκ πλουσίου
 πτωχὸν γενέσθαι, μεταβολὴ μὲν, ἡδὺ δ’ οὐ.
 ὥστ’ οὐχὶ πάντων ἐστὶ μεταβολὴ γλυκύ (fr. adesp. 859 K-A)

Impertinent slaves are best suited to show off their erudition in classics and point out how the high-flown *dicta* fail to reflect the ‘real’ life. A case of trivial nit-picking at the immensely popular *Orestes* may hint at the possibility that a significant part of the play’s plot or perhaps the intrigue had to do with the popular theme of reversal in fortune. But I would like to see all this pointing at *prota heuremata* and their inventors – a staple joke eventually¹⁴ – as indicative in a more general way of the rhetorical strategy of referring to tradition, canon, predecessors and a deliberate effort to improve upon them.

It is most probably a hen-pecked husband who pronounces the following lines in a fragment by Eubulus:

κακὸς
 κακῶς ἀπόλοιθ’ ὅστις γυναιῖκα δεύτερος
 ἔγημε· τὸν γὰρ πρῶτον οὐκ ἐρῶ κακῶς.
 ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἦν ἄπειρος, οἶμαι, τοῦ κακοῦ,
 ὁ δ’ οἶον ἦν γυνὴ κακὸν πεπυσμένος, etc. (Eub. fr. 115 K-A)

By the time of Menander, the joke becomes a little tired, but it is still used nonetheless:

ἐξώλης ἀπόλοιθ’ ὅστις ποτὲ

¹⁴ Euripides also has the first instance of this: see Barrett on *Hipp.* 407. See the references to comedy in Arnott (1996) 122 on Alexis 27 K-A and Dohm (1964) 130. The ancient critics were interested in the literature on *prota heuremata*: Taplin (1977) 438 n 2; and Nisbet-Hubbard (1970) on Hor. *Od.* i. 3.12. Περί εὐρημάτων treatises were written by Aristotle, Heracleides Ponticus (cf. Diog. Laert. V 88) and others; see Stemplinger (1912) 10f.; Leo (1912) 151ff., Fairweather (1983) 320.

ὁ πρῶτος ἦν γήμας, ἔπειθ' ὁ δεύτερος,
εἶθ' ὁ τρίτος, εἶθ' ὁ τέταρτος, εἶθ' ὁ μεταγενής (Men. fr. 119 K-A)

It is not just a reference to an accursed *protos heuretes* of marriage, but also a punning reference to all other familiar jokes of the similar nature. Improving on a predecessor, writing as if in reaction to something rather than coming up with a wholly original play, was one way of producing fast and with economy, leaving enough space for the most interesting scenes. Of course, as each unhappy husband identified himself as belonging to the long tradition of men paying the price for the invention of marriage, every improvement on the joke also drew attention to earlier treatments and the poet's cleverness in surpassing them. Goldhill (1991) 221 well comments on 'the archetypal comic appropriation – which purloins in order to mark its own superiority, the *Aufhebung* of the practice of others, only to remake the joke by the parodic repetition with a difference.'

I shall return to this below, showing how a clever appropriation of the stock material may make it seem novel or at least better executed, and thus perhaps also subtly drawing attention to the creative process itself and the playwright's inventiveness in particular. However, let us return to the discussion of the self-enclosed world of New Comedy where everything necessarily looks similar.¹⁵ A brief mention here and there of tradition is not all it is about: with the appearance of *Dyskolos*, Görler (1961) quickly noted the striking similarity, down to some minor details, of a scene in it to Terence's *Eunuchus*. His examination of the evidence led him to conclude: '...Nicht nur gleiche Handlungsschemen hat Menander mehrfach in verschiedener Weise verwandt. Mindestens einmal hat er dies Spiel so weit getrieben, daß er eine ganze Szene einer Komödie in einer anderen nachgebildet und trotzdem beiden Szenen durch die unterschiedlichen Charaktere und die unterschiedliche Stellung im dramatischen Ablauf einen völlig verschiedenen Stimmungsgehalt gegeben hat.'¹⁶ We may be certain that if we had more of Menander, we would find even more proofs of the recycling of the same material and this fact would not be lost on the audience.

Görler finds interesting parallels between Act V of *Eunuchus* and Act II of *Dyskolos*. In *Eunuchus*, Thais castigates her servant Pythias for not having guarded the girl under their protection more closely. The slaves' lack of care gave Chaerea a

¹⁵ Cf. Sandbach (1977) 62, Konstan (1995) 195f. n.49.

¹⁶ Arnott (1997) 74 briefly comments on the similar wording of Men. *Perik* 1024-26 and Ter. *Haut.* 156ff. and opines that 'Menander's productivity may well have led him to adopt similar solutions in more than one play.' See also Arnott (1964) 232ff. and Williams, T. (1962) 221ff.

chance to rape the virgin. This chastisement parallels the situation in *Dyskolos* 233ff, where Daos is similarly rebuked by his master Gorgias for not having taken greater care to protect Gorgias' half-sister from a stranger's advances. After the dialogue, in both plays the 'seducer' now comes on stage and delivers a monologue without noticing the other two persons. While both Gorgias and Thais are eventually convinced by the young man's pleading and help him, the slaves in both plays are sarcastic towards the youngsters. Even if this basic pattern is similar, we notice that the scenes serve different purposes at different points in the two plays: Chaerea did in fact commit the crime of which he is accused, but at the end of the play there is no room for retardation and the atmosphere does not become too serious. In the early scene of *Dyskolos* Sostratos has neither committed the crime nor has any intention to do so; therefore Gorgias' misguided moralizing may be developed into a serious speech, humorously off the mark, without any danger that the spectators' opinion of Sostratos would in the process become unfavourable.

Dyskolos belongs to an early stage of Menander's career, yet compared to the other scene it shows freshness and even irony in the way that pattern is used. Unless one scene is directly modeled on the other, it seems unavoidable to conclude that Menander must have approached some scenes – such as this one which we may call, say, the 'exposure of a rapist' – as a pattern that could be conveniently borrowed from play to play, adjusting details to a particular place in a given plot. Sometimes he perhaps created whole plays out of such basic scene patterns and – one almost wants to say – out of a few basic *keywords*. Even if spectators were not aware of the particular similarities between *Dyskolos* and the Greek original of *Eunuchus*, some set scenes of the kind shown by Görler very probably existed. Naturally, similarities may have also brought about (unintentionally?) ironic differences but it is impossible to be certain about how these could have been appreciated by spectators without clear signposts.

Let us look for instance at the role of the clothes of the two young men: Chaerea earlier left the stage in search of a place where he could get rid of his eunuch's outfit. He comes back on stage in the same clothes because he could not change at his friend Antipho's since both Antipho's parents were in. Sostratos comes on stage after a similarly futile mission – he went home looking for Getas but the slave was not in. Both the young men return on stage because their missions failed.¹⁷ It is interesting that even details such as the two young men's clothes are used to move the plot in mutually ironic ways. Chaerea's humorously jarring outfit becomes a

¹⁷ Görler (1961) 301.

good motivation for his exit and later an opportune reentrance on stage, and for some sarcastic comments about inappropriate clothes borrowed from a eunuch. Against this, Sostratos wears a respectable *chlanis* – but he too is taken for a lesser man by the same token! In his case, the *chlanis* as a mark of a rich man comes close to incriminating him as a soft urban boy. Gorgias suggests he should take it off, or else Knemon will not even look at him. The *chlanis* as a symbol of a rich, leisurely urban man needs to be hidden from the hard-working Knemon or else the intrigue against him will never even start. Thus while in *Eunuchus* the costume was part of the scheme that enabled Chaerea to rape the girl, in *Dyskolos* the *chlanis* is an obstacle to any stratagem to win Knemon. Here too, however, it is taken as a proof of the young man's innate softness and laziness, a symbol as pregnant in meaning as the eunuch's clothes.

Sometimes, as in *Samia* to be noted briefly below, it is naturally difficult to say if the irony caused by comparison with other plays is anyhow meaningful for the spectators. It could be if the motif being invoked was familiar enough and still fresh in their minds. If there were memorable plays before *Samia* that used the following motif, then we may be right to suggest that Menander in his play offered his audience a seemingly typical motif and allowed them to recognize its traditional value, only to surprise them by deviating from it, and then by surprising them again by an ironic use he finds for it, after all.

In a fragment by Diphilos, a boastful cook holds a lengthy sermon about the type of guests he serves. He concludes:

οὐ δὲ νῦν σ' ἄγω,
πορνεῖόν ἐστι, πολυτελῶς Ἀδώνια
ἄγουσ' ἑταίρα μεθ' ἑτέρων πορνῶν. (*Zographos*, fr. 42.38ff. K-A)

Would our appreciation of Menander's *Samia* be enriched if we considered the tradition behind the motif of a courtesan celebrating an Adonis festival? Chrysis looks back at the tradition in some respects, but also, in a novel way, she is far removed from the world of courtesans, she is a *pallake* now enjoying a 'near-maternal' status and her celebration of the festival noticeably included free-born, respectable women from the neighbourhood who often came to visit her. To a

spectator aware of earlier treatment,¹⁸ Moschion's narration could have sounded 'problematic':

ἐξ ἀγροῦ δὴ καταδραμών,
 ὡς ἔτυ]χ[έ] γ', εἰς Ἀδώνι' αὐτὰς κατέλαβον
 συνηγμένας ἐνθάδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς μετὰ τινων
 ἄλλω]ν γυναικῶν (38ff.)

Chrysis lives with Demeas in a steady relationship. She has even made friends with the freeborn women from her neighbourhood. They represent the social class that would not tolerate her if she did not behave like a free woman and Demeas' 'wife' (in ethical terms they validate her status of Demeas' partner, even if she can never aspire to rise to a formalised relationship with him before the law). And yet, the image of a courtesan celebrating the festival (as seen e.g. in Diphilos' depiction) resurfaces as the plot of *Samia* develops. Demeas is gradually made to fall into a grave error that causes him to look at Chrysis as an unscrupulous courtesan who seduced a weak young man. Her status and morality become questioned and this aspect of the plot may be seen to have been subtly foreshadowed by the expository detail of her celebrating the Adonis festival.

If she stayed in the house, Demeas is led to believe, the threat to young Moschion's well-being would be too great. The house would gain in connotations not different from the *porneion* mentioned in Diphilos. We know tantalizingly little about Diphilos' play or any other plays that used the motif, but it cannot be ruled out that Menander inserted the detail about the festival frequently associated with courtesans in order to deepen – for a significant moment at least – the problematic nature of Chrysis' status.

This leads to an often overlooked point. Seeing too many comedies must have made the spectators aware of even unintended similarities between individual plays and even this trivial fact external to the drama proper must have constantly shaped their appreciation of each and every new performance. In short, appreciation of a closed canon is a more complex matter than we usually imagine, dependent on too many variables that are lost to us.

Formal elements were then reinvented, enlarged or just repeated without much innovation with intentional or quite unintentional effects.¹⁹ I note in passing that

¹⁸ Cf. also Diphilos, fr. 49 K-A (open to question), the title of Philippides' comedy *Adoniazousai*. Leo (1912) 174. I am not suggesting that the festival was held *only* by courtesans (the evidence of *Samia* itself proves the opposite): cf. Winkler (1990) 199-202.

Arnott takes the lacunose text at *Epit.* 1002 ὥσπερ λύκ[ος] to refer to Chairestratos. The wolf with gaping jaws (λύκος χανών) was a proverbial expression²⁰ used of frustrated hopes and Arnott may be right to suggest that Chairestratos, now deprived of Habrotonon, would be a suitable subject of the proverb. The text is lacunose and what follows is sheer speculation but could the proverb perhaps be spoken by, say, jubilant Onesimos speaking of Smikrines and referring to the old man's soon-to-be frustrated hopes? He will not snatch his daughter away and he will not lay his hands on his daughter's dowry, Onesimos may be saying (cf. 1079f.). If so, we would have a nice verbal similarity with *Aspis*. The same proverb is used there by the slave Daos speaking of another Smikrines who tried to lay his hands on the dowry that he considered rightfully his (372f.). Daos promises to have some fun with the old man and, although we do not know how that went, it could have been similar to Onesimos' teasing of Smikrines in *Epitrepontes*. Even if such a direct verbal link as this cannot be established, the two Smikrines' dowry-related aspirations both in *Aspis* and *Epitrepontes* are striking on their own (noteworthy are also similarities with e.g. *Stichus* and *Trinummus*).

One could collect examples of many recurring patterns. However a bare catalogue would not do justice to Menander's art²¹ simply because through a

¹⁹ Sosikrates (?3rd c.) has a character in his *Parakatatheke* comment on the humour of burdening someone unaccustomed to manual work with a heavy δίκηλλα: ὅταν γάρ, οἶμαι, λευκὸς ἄνθρωπος, παχύς, / ἀργός, λάβητι δίκηλλαν, εἰωθὼς τρουφᾶν, / πεντεστάτηρον, γίγνεται τὸ πνεῦμ' ἄνω. (fr. 1 K-A). I would like to see it as a tantalizing piece of evidence for a continuation of minute verbal (and plot?) echoes that go back to the previous century (similarities with Men. *Dyskolos* are interesting indeed: 355ff., 390, 754f., 764ff.).

²⁰ Leutsch (1851) 121, 510, Austin on *Asp.* 372 and Latin parallels in Otto 198.

²¹ Ancient criticism noticed the dramatists' recycling of the same material. On Menander (and Sophocles) we have Πορφυρίου ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀ' τῆς φιλολόγου ἀκροάσεως: ὅπου γε καὶ Μένανδρος τῆς ἀρρωστίας ταύτης ἐπλήσθη, ὃν ἡρέμα μὲν ἤλεγξε διὰ τὸ ἄγαν αὐτὸν φιλεῖν Ἀριστοφάνης ὁ γραμματικὸς ἐν ταῖς παραλλήλοις αὐτοῦ τε καὶ ἀφ' ὧν ἔκλεψεν ἐκλογαῖς; Λατίνος δὲ ἐξ βιβλίου, ἃ ἐπέγραψε Περὶ τῶν οὐκ ἰδίων Μενάνδρου, τὸ πλῆθος αὐτοῦ τῶν κλοπῶν ἐξέφηνε· καθάπερ ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεὺς Φιλόστρατος Περὶ τῆς τοῦ Σοφοκλέους κλοπῆς πραγματείαν κατεβάλετο. Καυκίλιος δὲ ὡς τι μέγα πεφωρακῶς ὄλον δρᾶμα ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἰς τέλος Ἀντιφάνους τὸν Οἰωνιστὴν μεταγράψαι φησὶ τὸν Μένανδρον εἰς τὸν Δεισιδαίμονα, in Eusebios, *Pr. evan.* X 3, 12. 465d. Cf. Men. *Test.* 76, 81 K-A and Zagagi (1994) 17. It is clear from this that Aristophanes of Byzantium was interested in Menander's debts to earlier literature although the title of his treatise was probably not as condemnatory as Porphyrios has preserved it for us: αἱ Παράλληλοι αὐτοῦ [i.e. Μενάνδρου] τε καὶ ἀφ' ὧν ἔκλεψεν ἐκλογαί. Latinus, a less discerning critic, is said to have come up with six books of evidence that Menander was a plagiarist. And we have Caecilius' claim that Menander stole the whole play Οἰωνιστής written by Antiphanes and took it into his Δεισιδαίμων. This could indicate a refashioning of an old play and bringing it on stage under Menander's name - that is

combination of various elements of surprise, irony, and multidimensional structuring, Menander gave even recurring episodes a sense of fresh originality. This is then a place to stress that – unlike in Aristophanes – poetic self-advertisement could not depend on laughing at the conventional tools of their trade. Nothing would be achieved with the strategy displayed in *Clouds* where the rehashing of motives is equated with cheating the audience.²² One’s own originality in the genre had to be alluded to without criticising the rivals’ material that was in all essentials common to all New Comedy poets. An obvious solution was to ‘intensify’ the dramatic experience for the audience. As a strategy of poetic defense, poets may choose not to advertise their novelty but the *degree* to which their work was unusual. To advertise a clever plot, poets put in their characters’ mouths remarks on its unusual nature²³ and on the difficult obstacles that stand in the way of a resolution. The ‘no-one-like-him-has-ever-lived’ sort of extravagant phrasing seems to be ‘selling’ a particular play by stressing its originality, thus in an efficient way making the audience receptive of what will come next. For instance, even though the misanthrope was a frequent object of derision on stage – and possibly more so at the early stage of Menander’s career when *Dyskolos* was performed, we still hear Gorgias say about Knemon:

ταύτηι πατήρ
 ἐσθ’ οἶος οὐδεὶς γέγονεν οὔτε τῶν πάλαι
 ἄνθρωπος οὔτε τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς. (*Dysk.* 323ff.)

The point is to focus the audience, and to have them wonder how such ‘uniquely’²⁴ intractable characters are to be won over. Extraordinary efforts are clearly called for:

how Stemplinger (1912) 23 understands Athen. III 127bc. Alternatively, it could have been a simple case of one author deliberately imitating the other.

²² οὐδ’ ὑμᾶς ζητῶ ἔξαπατᾶν δις καὶ τρις ταῦτ’ εἰσάγων, / ἀλλ’ ἀεὶ καινὰς ιδέας εἰσφέρων σοφίζομαι, / οὐδὲν ἀλλήλαισιν ὁμοίας καὶ πάσας δεξιᾶς (*Ar. Nub.* 546ff.). Redfield (1990) 315ff.: ‘quite probably this claim to novelty is itself generic and all the poets of Old Comedy claimed to be the only ones with new ideas.’

²³ E.g. *Sam.* 564-6.

²⁴ Μονότροπος was written by Phrynichos, Anaxilas, and Ophelios; Τίμων by Antiphanes, and Δύσκολος by Mnesimachos. And equally so, Smikrines of *Aspis* was probably not the first in the tradition of comic misers, yet Tyche is categorical about him: πονηρίαὶ δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὅλως / ὑπερπέπαικεν (*Men. Asp.* 116f.).

οὐ τοῦ τυχόντος, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, πόνου
 τουτὶ τὸ προᾶγμά <γ'> ἀλλὰ συντονωτέρου.
 πρόδηλόν ἐστιν. (179ff.)

Characters fall into despair and 'antidramatic' resignation before an unshakeable Knemon or Smikrines and plays reach an apparent deadlock. The playwright advertises to his audience a character that threatens to break down the limits of the genre. Paradoxically, the most interesting comic characters are those that seem unaware of comic limitations. Self-advertisement takes an interesting shape: the poet seems to be almost suggesting that while other plays manage to finish within the given period, this play is of no such 'flat' nature because characters refuse to obey conventional rules of the canon.

In tragedy and earlier comedy there was a sense of *real* danger if things misfired. Dicaeopolis speaks of his plan to venture a private peace treaty as: ἐργάσομαί τι δεινὸν ἔργον καὶ μέγα (Ar. *Ach.* 128) and such it was. Likewise, to give only one tragic example, Euripides' *Orestes* opens with a most dangerous situation facing the protagonist:

κυρία δ' ἤδ' ἡμέρα
 ἐν ἧι διοίσει ψῆφον Ἀργείων πόλις,
 εἰ χρὴ θανεῖν νῶ λευσίμῳ πετρώματι... (Eur. *Or.* 48ff.)²⁵

New Comedy could not boast such dramatic dangers, yet it clothed its pettier problems in similar language: ἄν θεὸς θέλημι / οὐκ ἄν ἀπολοίμην (Men. fr. 43 K-A).²⁶ The only characters who were in fact in physical danger were slaves threatened with hard work in the mills. If slaves find themselves in a particularly dangerous position - and stress the mess they are in, it only goes to advertise their capacity for scheming and finding a way out of difficult situations. Such advertisements could make the spectators appreciate all the more cleverly constructed plots that – in a plausible way – deal with uniquely intractable obstacles.

There is ample evidence that a well-constructed plot was valued highly in the fourth-century.²⁷ Not least of all there is the famous anecdote about Menander

²⁵ Three years before *Orestes* (Ar. *Thesm.* and *Lys.* were probably staged in 411, *Orestes* in 408: cf. Σ on 371) Euripides himself appears on stage pressed to act to save his life: ΕΥ. Τῆδε θῆμέρα κριθήσεται / εἴτ' ἔστ' ἔτι ζῶν εἴτ' ἀπόλωλ' Εὐριπίδης. (Ar. *Thesm.* 75ff.)

²⁶ The original, according to Donatus, for Ter. *An.* 611.

²⁷ See Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980) 18ff.

preserved in Plutarch. When someone questioned him about the newest play, whether or not he would be able to finish it in time for the approaching Dionysia, the playwright answered yes: νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς, ἔγωγε πεποίηκα τὴν κωμωιδίαν. ὠικονόμηται γὰρ ἢ διάθεσις, δεῖ δ' αὐτῇι τὰ στιχίδια ἐπαῖσαι.²⁸ All that remained, he says, was to put the plot quickly into lines. The story obviously does no justice to Menander's exquisite use of language²⁹ or the delineation of his characters, but one does not expect that much either from a simple riposte.³⁰

Menander's plots are often an exploration of the limits of comic possibilities that nonetheless land the spectators at the expected goal without a trace of artificiality. He intensifies the dramatic experience, especially the danger and obstacles in the way of resolution, but at the same time puts much care into showing that the plot is running smoothly, without cheap tricks that would disqualify him as a dramatist.

As remarked, through a 'no-one-like-him-ever-lived' kind of intensification the poet places his spectators in a receptive mood, having them wonder how a hopeless situation can be saved within the hour or so allotted to the performance. Aristotle warned against episodic plays (Arist. *Poet.* 1451b-52a) – the ideal plot, he says, should move on 'by itself.'³¹

The prime example of a clever and smooth plot among Menander's plays is found in *Epitrepontes*. The initial situation is completely hopeless and the individual characters' stance makes any progress difficult. What force can achieve a happy resolution and restore to each other the separated husband and wife? Against gods of tragedy stands a new but no less potent force: it is coincidence, inexplicable and even ironic, a clever mechanism depending on seemingly insignificant parts fitting together in a surprising way. Menander brings about the resolution with the help of all stage movements, however accidental, so that the husband may recognize his wife's loyalty and chastity, although they live separated from each other. Their reunification is expected but we are shown that even though the husband and wife live near each other, nothing but a very lucky series of cleverly assembled accidents can bring them back together.

²⁸ Plut. *Moral.* 347E (*Test.* 70 K-A)

²⁹ Frequently discussed and appreciated. The starting point is Sandbach (1970), Katsouris has a monography on it (1975).

³⁰ For Aristotle care about plot-construction is more important than delineation of character (Arist. *Poet.* 1450a23-26). Could it be a hint about the origin of the anecdote?

³¹ Compare the sentiment in Terence: *equidem plus hodie boni / feci imprudens quam sciens ante hunc diem umquam* (Ter. *Hec.* 879f.).

What could possibly be realistic about this dependence on elaborate coincidence, one may well ask. And why Menander, instead of silently passing over the technique, actually draws attention to the element of arbitrariness in the behaviour of the play's characters? It seems that he draws attention to the coincidental and the arbitrary in order to emphasize the indispensable nature of every single cog in his exquisite plot mechanism. True, such an accumulation of happy coincidences does not happen in real life every day³², but it is not downright implausible either due to (at least a semblance of) motivation for everything that happens on stage.

Coincidence is a technical solution to the genre's limitations and requirements. It creates a sense of novelty, irony, and surprise for the spectators who, like the characters, are often kept in the dark about the timing and the meaning of such coincidences. New Comedy poets must have been aware of the ambiguous nature of coincidence and its place in their cleverly constructed plots. At times they could even have some fun with their own sincerity in plausibly motivating characters and action as the two examples below will show.

Asked what takes him, an infrequent guest, to Athens, Crito comes up with an answer sounding almost perfunctory:

CH. quid tu Athenas insolens? CR. eventit. (*Andria* 907)

This is the man who holds the key to *anagnorisis* and a happy ending yet he is not given a more plausible reason for arriving so opportunely? Poorly veiled arbitrariness makes another character on stage suspicious: naturally paranoid Simo thinks Crito a hoax, part of a scheme to fool him – for indeed his reason for arrival is highly unusual and thus suspicious:

itane adtemperate eventit, hodie in ipsis nuptiis
 ut veniret, ant(e)hac numquam? est vero huic credundum, Chreme. (*Andria* 916f.)

³² Just to examples of deeply moved characters who comment on their extremely good luck: *ego hodie, neque speravi neque credidi: / is inprouiso filiam inueni tamen; / et eam de genere summo adulescenti dabo / ingenuo, Atheniensi et cognato meo.* (Plaut. *Rudens* 1195-98).

οὐδενὸς χρηὴ πράγματος / τὸν εὖ φρονοῦνθ' ὄλωσ ἀπογνῶναί ποτε. / ἄλωτὰ γίνετ' ἐπιμελείαι καὶ πόνωι / ἅπαντ'. ἐγὼ τούτου παράδειγμα νῦν φέρω / ἐν ἡμέραι μιᾷ κατείργασμαι γάμον / ὃν οὐδ' ἂν εἶς ποτ' ᾧετ' ἀνθρώπων ὄλωσ. (Men. *Dysk.* 860ff.)

It is important dramatically: Crito is offended and in his anger he blurts out all the surprising facts that he knows and that would have otherwise remained forever hidden. Even though Chremes' *evenit* is perfectly well motivated³³ it serves as an ironical comment about the necessity *deus ex machina* in this play.

There must have been some cases where comparison with predecessors verged on metatheatrical by *explicitly* drawing attention to the *comic* stock types. In adesp. fr. 1093 K-A (P. Heidelberg 184 fr. 11) a cook is seen talking about the representation of his colleagues on comic stage and feels sorry for their pathetic way of pinching insignificant bits and pieces of food (adesp. fr. 1093.221ff. K-A).

Similarly in *Perikeiromene* Daos is introduced by his young master Moschion as a cheeky slave often caught lying in the past (*Pk.* 267ff.). This introduces a familiar figure but also prepares the audience for a subtle variation: a young master is often helped by his slave in his love affair and Daos may be expected to act similarly. In fact, the young Moschion's slave will play a mischievous trickster, the role more typical for him when dealing with old masters. It helps, therefore, if from the beginning we see Daos' mischievous nature towards Moschion emphasized.

The predictability of the behaviour of particular character types allowed for a quick introduction by references to comic conventions, and the recognition of typical comic types was of significant help in motivating characters' behaviours and their expectations in terms of other characters' responses – without the canon of stock characters, psychologically plausible motivation would require starting from scratch and spelling out all the tedious details in each play and it would not necessarily follow that the level of verisimilitude would be any greater.³⁴ Simo in Ter. *Andria*, when suspecting foul play from his servant, offers by way of proof only: 'I know you' (*quia te noram* 502) and the playwright may count on the audience's awareness of the behaviour of typical comic slaves. Just as spectators came to expect certain behaviour from comic types, so too characters on stage consider, say, slaves, courtesans and soldiers as endowed with recognizable

³³ In fact the *deus ex machina* Crito had a good reason to come to Athens at this time, only he probably did not want to confess to his motivation openly: he arrived with the intention of checking the possibility of inheriting Thais' property. However now that he saw that Glycerium was still being considered Thais' sister he must have realized that there would have been no point in pressing his claim and so he is deliberately vague.

³⁴ Thierfelder (1936) 324 ff. on stock types and characters. Intriguers, for instance, often count on predictable reactions of those who are to be fooled: intrigues are plausible because characters on stage base their judgment on their past experiences (*exo tou dramatos*) and such experiences deliberately coincide with the spectators' awareness of particular comic types and their typical behaviour.

character traits. Nothing is better for plausible motivation than conventional psychology.

Direct comments on the typical building blocs of comedy can however come dangerously close to metatheatre in the hands of *panourgoi*. Intriguers and rascals are ready to perform little posing acts they learnt 'in life' but which in fact look remarkably similar to what are typical tools of comic trade. The danger of a *panourgos* intriguer lies precisely in that he is capable of *anything*, even speaking about his own theatrical methods with cool detachment, enhancing the present experience at the cost of the 'fictional' dramas. What is performed in earnest (*seuerum et serium*) in other plays becomes mere fun (*per iocum*) open to an analytical examination and an almost ironical comment. The contrast and confusion of the two concepts is very explicit in Plautus' *Poenulus*, based on Alexis' *Karchedonios*:

MILPHIO. opino hercle hodie, quod ego dixi per iocum,
id euenturum esse et seuerum et serium,
ut haec inueniantur hodie esse huius filiae. (Plaut. *Poen.* 1169ff.)

What by Milphio was meant as no more than an arbitrary joke³⁵ turned out as 'real' in the play's universe. Even a New Comedy playwright no doubt saw much humorous potential in the tension between the universe of the created play and the disclosure of the comic experience that intriguers offered.³⁶ They give a sense that a present play is not scripted but is 'real life' itself, while tricks borrowed from tragedy or comedy denigrate other plays to the level of 'fiction'. I shall provide two examples.

Theron's intrigue in *Sikyonios* toys with the necessity of a satisfactory and typical New Comedy ending. Stratophanes, believed a Sicyonian, is in love with Philoumene whom he bought from pirates in Caria some time ago (2ff.). But how to make the girl eligible for marriage with Stratophanes? This familiar dramatic problem turns into a developed scene of generic self-irony. Theron, Stratophanes' ingenious parasite, tries in a rather unclear passage to convince Stratophanes to

³⁵ The intrigue is sometimes presented as a joke: as in Ter. *Eun.* (CH. *dixi pulchre...* PA. *iocabar equidem.* 376, 378), Plaut. *Mostellaria*, *Mercator*, *Poenulus*, etc. Blänsdorf (1982) *passim*.

³⁶ Thierfelder (1936) 330, judging by Latin evidence concludes: 'Menander besonders der der terenzischen, also späteren Stücke, [hat] gern Gelegenheit zur Ironisierung der auch von ihm eifrig angewandten Klischees der Technik ergriffen, grundsätzlich im gleichen Geiste wie andere Dichter in früher erwähnten Fällen, nur teils verwegener, und zugleich graziöser, teils ernsthafter.'

agree to a scheme by which a witness is to be found who would *perjure* himself and claim that Philoumene is a free-born girl, thus removing the obstacle that lies in the way of the marriage.

τί δὴ τὸ κακ]όν ποτ' ἐστίν; οὔτω μαρτυρεῖν
 μάρτυρα] τοιοῦτον ἄν τις εὔροι πολλαχοῦ
 ἐνταῦθ' ἐ]ν ἄστει τοῦδ' Ἐλευσίς ἐστι, καὶ
 πανήγ]υρίς που. τίς νοήσει, πρὸς θεῶν;
 εἰ συνδρα]μεῖται δῆμος, εἷς τις οὐ ταχὺ
 τὴν παιδ'] ἀφελκύσαιτ' ἄν. (Men. Sic. 55ff.³⁷)

The prologue speaker would have told the audience that the girl is indeed a freeborn Athenian (cf. l. 2) as she must be if the play is to reach any meaningful resolution. The audience acquainted with the genre would realize that the majority of New Comedy intrigues are directed at removing obstacles in the way of the lovers' (re)union and that often it is the seemingly inappropriate origin that forms an obstacle to such a resolution.³⁸

The dramatic necessity for such an ending turned into an ironic statement about plotting which required an undoubtedly contrived way to reach the satisfactory resolution. Theron's intrigue addresses a typical comic problem, but Theron himself becomes a victim of ignorance when what he devised *per iocum* begins a life of its own (as something *seuerum et serium*). Act V (312ff.) brings dangerously close together the pretence and 'real life'. Theron brings on stage a man whom he wishes to convince to play the part of a witness³⁹ who would confirm that Philoumene is a free-born daughter of an Athenian citizen. The situation gets out of control when poor Kichesias refuses to make a financial profit out of perjury. He must have found the task unpalatable, not least because he himself knew how it was to lose a

³⁷ Following Arnott's text in the lacunae.

³⁸ Dieterle (1980) 38-42 gives the summary charts that make clear the predominance of (re)unions of lovers as the most obvious goal of comic intrigues. In the following plays such a (re)union requires the removal of the obstacle of one partner's inadequate origin through an *anagnorisis*: Plaut. *Casina*, *Curculio*, *Poenulus*, Ter. *Andria*, *Haut.*, *Eunuchus*, *Phormio*. Good evidence of how frequent this motif is can be found in the mistake some critics were led to make when parts of Men. *Samia* first appeared. It was believed that the same motif of *anagnorisis* had to be used in the play to allow for the reunion of the lovers Demeas and Chrysis, with Chrysis' status as a courtesan proved false by some evidence. Only further papyrus finds proved such guessing to have been wrong, misled as it was by a sentimental sympathy with Chrysis (no working courtesans is in fact known to be Athenian born). See Lloyd-Jones (1972).

³⁹ I follow the interpretation of GS ad 312 (and Belardinelli ad loc.).

daughter... Theron, on hearing that, believes that the old man instead of playing a witness wishes to play the part of the girl's very father and the schemer admits this is far superior to his idea. Theron the parasite does not for a while believe that Kichesias is serious and takes it that the impecunious (what a fine touch!) Kichesias easily slipped into the role asked of him. The situation results in splendid irony from the moment that the impostor brings an unsuspecting old man and tries to teach him the role that the old man knows only too well already:

ΚΙ οὐκ εἰς τὸν ὄλεθρον – <ΘΗ> χαλεπὸς ἦσθα. ΚΙ –ἀποφθερεῖ
 ἀπ' ἐμοῦ; Κιχησίαν σὺ τοιοῦθ' ὑπέλαβες
 ἔργον ποιήσῃν ἢ λαβεῖν ἂν παρὰ τινος
 ἀργύριον. ΘΗ. ἀδίκου πράγματος.⁴⁰ ΚΙ Κιχησίαν;
 Σκαμβωνίδην γενόμενον; ΘΗ. εὖ γ' ἄρ' ὑπέλαβες;
 τούτου με πρᾶξαι μισθὸν αὐτοῦ, μηκέτι
 ὦν ἔλεγον ἄρτι. ΚΙ. τοῦ τίνος; ΘΗ. Κιχησίας
 Σκαμβωνίδης γε - πολὺ σὺ βέλτιον λέγεις.
 νοεῖν τι φαίνει τὸν τύπον τοῦ πράγματος.
 οὔτος γενοῦ· καὶ σιμὸς εἶ γὰρ ἀπὸ τύχης
 καὶ μικρός, οἷον ἔλεγεν ὁ θεράπων τότε.
 ΚΙ. γέρων ὅς εἰμι γέγονα. ΘΗ. πρόσθεσ "θυγάτριον
 Ἀλῆθεν ἀπολέσας σεαυτοῦ τετραετές-"
 ΚΙ. Δρόμωνά τ' οἰκέτην ἀπολέσας. ΘΗ. εὖ πάννυ·
 "ἀρπασθὲν ὑπὸ ληιστῶν." ΚΙ. ἀνέμνησας πάθους
 τὸν ἄθλιόν με καὶ φθορᾶς⁴¹ οἰκτρᾶς ἐμοί.
 ΘΗ. ἄριστα· τοῦτον διαφύλαττε τὸν τρόπον
 τό τ' ἐπιδακρῦειν. ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος σφόδρα. (Sik. 343ff.)

Theron wants to create something that, on reflection, must be already somewhere in the play *in earnest* for the drama to reach a satisfactory resolution. Menander could well have brought on stage a different Kichesias with any perfunctory purpose and have him coincidentally become reunited with his daughter. However, through Theron we are treated to a travesty of the theme of such dramatic accidents before reaching the *de rigeur* recognition scene. An audience aware of the only possible generic resolution available in this play (foretold in the prologue) must

⁴⁰ I follow Arnott's lively distribution of parts.

⁴¹ v. 358: †θυραστ† : θυγατρὸς Barigazzi, Post: φθορᾶς Arnott.

realize the explicit irony of the intrigue and the freshness with which Menander reached the required anagnorisis after all. We perhaps associate such scenes that can laugh at generic requirements more with Plautus – and indeed comparison with the very similar *Poenulus* (1100ff.) is unavoidable.⁴²

Another character who comes dangerously close to revealing the all-too-conventional elements of the genre is Habrotonon in *Epitrepontes*. In order to find the true parents of the foundling baby, she devises a scheme that entails her posing as the baby’s mother. To succeed, she must play the part of a raped girl, but fortunately she knows what they usually say, and should not have problems sounding plausible as she seems acquainted with their situations⁴³:

ABP. θεάσ', Ὀνήσιμε,
 ἄν συναρέσῃ σοι τοῦμὸν ἐνθύμημ' ἄρα.
 ἐμὸν ποῆσομαι τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτ' ἐγώ,
 τὸν δακτύλιον λαβοῦσά τ' εἴσω τουτονὶ
 εἴσειμι πρὸς ἐκεῖνον. ON. λέγ' ὁ λέγεις· ἄρτι γὰρ
 νοῶ. ABP. κατιδὼν μ' ἔχουσαν ἀνακρινεῖ πόθεν
 εἴληφα. φήσω "Ταυροπολίοις παρθένος
 ἔτ' οὔσα", τὰ τ' ἐκείνηι γενόμενα πάντ' ἐμὰ
 ποουμένη· τὰ πλεῖστα δ' αὐτῶν οἶδ' ἐγώ.
 ON. ἄριστά γ' ἀνθρώπων. ABP. ἐὰν οἰκειὸν ἦι
 αὐτῶι τὸ πρᾶγμα <α δ'>, εὐθύς ἤξει φερόμενος
 ἐπὶ τὸν ἔλεγχον καὶ μεθύων γε νῦν ἐρεῖ
 πρότερος ἅπαντα καὶ προπετῶς· ἂ δ' ἂν λέγηι
 προσομολογήσω τοῦ διαμαρτεῖν μηδὲ ἐν
 προτέρα λέγουσα. ON. ὑπέρευγε νῆ τὸν Ἥλιον.
 ABP. τὰ κοινὰ ταυτὶ δ' ἀκκιοῦμαι τῶι λόγῳ
 τοῦ μὴ διαμαρτεῖν· "ὡς ἀναιδῆς ἦσθα καὶ
 ἰταμός τις". ON. εὐγέ. ABP. κατέβαλες δέ μ' ὡς σφόδρα·
 ἰμάτια δ' οἶ' ἀπώλεσ' ἢ τάλαιν' ἐγώ"
 φήσω. πρὸ τούτου δ' ἔνδον αὐτὸ βούλομαι
 λαβοῦσα κλαῦσαι καὶ φιλησαι καὶ πόθεν
 ἔλαβεν ἐρωτᾶν τὴν ἔχουσαν. ON. Ἡράκλεις.

⁴² Gratwick (1982) 101ff. presents a strong case for Menander’s *Sikyoniōs* as the model for Plautus’ *Poenulus* scene.

⁴³ Men. *Heros* (e.g. 74ff.) could have contained something like a narration of the circumstances of Myrrhine’s rape but, admittedly, fr. δεζ→ is too lacunose to be certain.

ABP. τὸ πέρας δὲ πάντων, “παιδίον τοίνυν” ἐρῶ
 “ἔστ’ ἰ. γεγονός σοι”, καὶ τὸ νῦν εὐρημένον
 δεῖξω. ON. πανούργως καὶ κακοήθως, Ἄβροτονον.
 ABP. ἂν δ’ ἐξετασθῆι ταῦτα καὶ φανῆι πατήρ
 ὦν οὗτος αὐτοῦ, τὴν κόρην ζητήσομεν
 κατὰ σχολήν.

(Men. *Epit.* 511ff.)

Habrotonon is intent on imitating τὰ κοινὰ - things commonly said by ravished girls, playing faithfully a part of a ravished girl – a strikingly self-conscious arrangement in the comic universe, and the more humorous for that. Admittedly, she does not reach anything like the explicitness of a Ballio in Plautus' *Pseudolus*.⁴⁴ It is this subtlety that distances Menander from both Aristophanes and Plautus. However, even with much subtler and implicit means Menander can in fact achieve the same effect as his more metatheatrical colleagues.⁴⁵

Because of such subtlety, Aelius Aristides ignores him completely in his Περὶ τοῦ παραφθέγματος, conceived with the specific purpose of defending a piece of incidental self-praise (παραφθέγμα) in his hymn to Athena.⁴⁶ When that remark caused offence, the rhetor set out to assemble examples from major literary genres to show how authorial self-praise pervaded most of them. Significantly enough, New Comedy finds no place in his list.⁴⁷ This could mean either that it was non-existent for him or that the genre simply did not provide examples explicit and useful enough for Aristides' rhetorical purposes; nothing that would approach the explicitness of a 'dramatic *parabasis*' to which he at one point compares his *paraphthema*.

⁴⁴ *Nugas theatri; uerba quae in comoediis solent lenoni dici, quae pueri sciunt: malum et scelestum et peiurum aibat esse me* (Plaut. *Pseudolus* 1081-83). On explicit mentions of plays and players in Terence and Plautus, see Knapp (1919).

⁴⁵ Studies examining metatheatre in Menander, notably Stockert (1997) and Gutzwiller (2000), are interesting but not utterly clinching for the very reason of Menander's subtlety. My example to show this would be cases where either an intriguer spelling out his scheme, or his listeners, comment on it with an oath by Dionysos – how can we be certain that it has anything to do with acknowledging a theatrical nature of the suggested intrigue? Cases such as *Sik.* 80-2 and *Dysk.* 346f. spring to mind, but is the oath by Dionysos really meant to hint at the theatrical connections of the god (e.g. *Ar. Nub.* 519)? Or is it just a conversational tag such as is not infrequently found elsewhere (*Ar. Av.* 1370, *Men. Sam.* 112; *Ar. Nub.* 90f., cf. 108)? On Menander's subtle characterization of characters through their use of oaths, see de Kat Eliassen (1975); Feneron (1974); Bain (1984). I am not sure there is any sound methodology to help with such problems where lack of material limits our knowledge. Nor is it certain that any increase in Menandrian finds would help us greatly here.

⁴⁶ See the discussion in Rutherford (1995).

⁴⁷ Rutherford (1995) 196.

Leaving aside the problematic case of tragedy,⁴⁸ we know that Old Comedy does allow room for the poet's voice to be heard: for instance, in *Peace* (736ff.) Aristophanes expresses a most confident self-praise, a wish to appropriate *kleos* (cf. κλεινότητα, 737) and primacy (πρωτος 739, 743) for raising an over-conventionalized genre from repeatedly staged stock types (Ἡρακλέας, 741) onto a higher level of *techne* (τέχνην μεγάλην ἡμῖν). Goldhill goes further and identifies as 'part of [Old] comedy's discourse ... a marked self-awareness and self-projection of its own fictionality.'⁴⁹ If we had more of Middle and New Comedy, we would be better placed to see how the dialogue between poets and their audience had to accommodate the gradual loss of the *parabasis* and keep within the bounds of prologues and epilogues.⁵⁰ However, I hope to have at least sketched the trends recoverable in the preserved play texts. The New Comedy poet had the advantage that he could take into account his audience's awareness of the genre and play with its self-enclosed similarities as a way of commenting on his art and his place in the tradition. I suggest, therefore, that Menander could address his audience as effectively as Aristophanes did before him through more explicit means before him. In the end it all depended on the spectator: the fonder he was of the genre, the more attuned he could become to the many layers of meaning hidden in the sentimental stories of everyday life.

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⁴⁸ Plutarch, for one, insists that Euripides (along with Pindar) actually does insert his own praise into his plays: φορτικωτάτη κέχρηται μεγαλαυχία τῷ συγκαταπλέκειν τοῖς τραγωδοῦμένοις πάθεισι καὶ πράγμασι μηδὲν προσήκοντα τὸν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον (Plut. *Mor.* 539 b-c). On the problem of tragic *parabasis*, cf. Bain (1975) 14ff. Of course, I do not touch here on the eloquence of veiled comments about a tragic poet's art such as Eur. *Ion* 507ff. and pronouncements referring to songs and dance: Henrichs (1994-95), Bain (1977) 210, Wilson and Taplin (1993/94).

⁴⁹ Goldhill (1991) 186.

⁵⁰ Probably references in comedy to rival poets and general discussions about literature were not restricted to the *parabasis*: fr. adesp. 1008 K-A raises an interesting question of whether such references and literary discussions were not commoner than we think. Arnott (1985) asks a hypothetical question about whether the kind of prologues we know from Terence did not in fact appear in some of his lost Greek originals. See Leo (1912) 238ff.

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