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ABSTRACT (English)

As the only surviving representative of New Comedy, Menander offers an interesting case-study of how ancient perceptions of genre definition, qualification and categorization may be subjected to ongoing renegotiation, but also how this ever-changing appreciation influences our understanding of the evolution of Comedy, both in Greece and in Rome. More specifically, with the discovery of Menander the genre of Ancient Comedy acquired a third area, 'New' Comedy – a 'Newness' originally perceived chronologically, but in recent decades, increasingly in terms of poetics. From a different perspective, the fortune of the Menander discovery (and the lack of other extant texts from New Comedy authors) resulted to the (uncritical) designation of Menander as representative par excellence of New Comedy, a designation that most recent research, however, has come to disprove. Roman Comedy was likewise appreciated, to a considerable degree, in comparison to Menander; and within the very genre of Roman Comedy, more or less close observance of Menander's 'archetypal' plays served as criterion for the characterization of Plautus as more 'Roman' and appealing, while Terence, famously described by Caesar as 'half-Menander' – itself a characterization open to both a positive and a negative interpretation – turned off the Roman audiences because of his alleged closeness to the Menandrian comic language. Performance theory, however, and the acknowledgement of the decidedly oral (namely, largely improvised) character of Plautine plays, have dissociated the appreciation of Roman Comedy from the Menandrian model. This, in turn, has led to a new appreciation of Menander as the exception rather than the mainstream voice of New Comedy.

ABSTRACT (German)

Der einzige überlieferte Vertreter der Neuen Komödie, Menander, bietet eine interessante Fallstudie dazu, wie alte Wahrnehmungen von Genre-Definition, Qualifizierung und Kategorisierung einer ständigen Neuaushandlung unterzogen werden, aber auch, wie diese sich verändernde Wertschätzung unser Verständnis von der Entwicklung der Komödie in Griechenland und Rom beeinflusst. Genauer gesagt, mit der Entdeckung von Menander wurde dem Genre der antiken Komödie ein dritter Bereich hinzugefügt, die ‚Neue‘ Komödie – eine „Neuheit“, die ursprünglich chronologisch, aber in den letzten Jahrzehnten immer mehr poetologisch wahrgenommen wird. Anders betrachtet, führte der Zufall der Entdeckung des Menander (und das Fehlen anderer Texte von Autoren der Neuen Komödie) dazu, dass Menander (unkritisch) als Vertreter par excellence der Neuen Komödie angesehen wurde – eine Bezeichnung, die die jüngere Forschung jedoch widerlegt hat.

Die Römische Komödie wurde ebenfalls in erheblichem Maße an Menander gemessen; innerhalb der Römischen Komödie diente die mehr oder weniger starke Ausrichtung an Menanders „archetypische“ Theaterstücke als Kriterium dafür, Plautus als eher „römisch“ und ansprechend zu beschreiben, während Terenz, den Caesar einen „halben Menander“ genannt hatte – eine Charakterisierung, die gleichermaßen für eine positive wie negative Interpretation offen ist – vom römischen Publikum gerade wegen seiner Nähe zur komischen Sprache Menanders abgelehnt wurde. Mittlerweile hat die Performance-Theorie und die Einschätzung des oralen (nämlich weitgehend improvisierten) Charakters der plautinischen Stücke jedoch die Bewertung der Römischen Komödie vom Modell des Menander unabhängig gemacht. Dies wiederum hat zu einer neuen Wertschätzung Menanders als die Ausnahme, nicht als die Mainstream-Stimme der Neuen Komödie geführt.

New Comedy and Roman Comedy: With and Without Menander

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Menander and New Comedy in Antiquity

Menander is indisputably the best known Greek dramatist of the postclassical era, since his are the only plays that have survived in extant form, and traditionally has been the ready literary model for all critics wishing to assess Roman Comedy in relation to the Greek literary tradition. In this respect, it is logical to view Menander as the leading representative of New Comedy. This characterization is further engrossed by the equally widespread opinion that Menander is the greatest Greek comic playwright after Aristophanes, a conviction that seems to have been fashioned with little surprise, because Menander became one of the most lauded Greek writers ever, his fame reaching a peak as early as the late third century BC when the critic Aristophanes of Byzantium ranked Menander “second only to Homer” among all ancient authors – like Homer, Menander is exemplary and outstanding.¹

Once Greek literature crossed over to Rome, the pairing of Homer to Menander along with their designation as the leading pair of ancient poets truly becomes a literary motif. Statius in his funerary elegy for the young Glaucias, refers to the young man’s recitations of Greek poetry before his parents and teachers, and notes that the texts Glaucias preferred were the speeches of Menander and the Homeric epics. A generation later, Homer and Menander feature side-by-side in Martial, who names Menander and Homer alone as the only books deserving to be offered as gifts.² Mario Citroni, in a recent discussion of this consistent pairing of Homer to Menander in Roman literature, attests to the propagation across the post-Hellenistic centuries of the fundamental bipartition of poetry into tragic and comic poetry – a concept originating in Plato’s philosophy. Plato designated

1 Test. 83 and 170 K.-A; Testimonia 83–167 K.-A. collect all known ancient judgments on Menander’s merit.

2 For Statius: *silv.* 2,1,113–119; esp. 114: *Attica facundi decurreret orsa Menandri*, ‘he declaimed the Attic speeches of the eloquent Menander’; for Martial: *Mart.* 14,87 recommends Menander, and 14,183 and 184, Homer.

Homer as the best tragic poet and Epicharmus as the best comic one. The division was formalized in the Hellenistic era, with Menander taking the place of Epicharmus as the leading representative of the comic form.³ In the third century BC, with the rise of Alexandrian scholarship, poetry was compartmentalized further into multiple genres, and a canon of representative poets was put together for each of these genres, but somehow this archetypal duet of leading poetic figures persisted alongside and above all types of genre compartmentalization.

The Latin theoreticians of literature along with the model of canonizing literature established by their Alexandrian counterparts embraced, too, this compartmentalization of drama into tragic and comic: it is through their testimony that Menander's reputation as the best comic poet in antiquity persisted, even became standardized across the centuries: hence, the dutiful reference to Menander's authenticity in Statius and Martial. And yet, the whole issue of appreciating Menander properly is more complex. Menander's superiority as comic author by the end of the Republic is recorded in a variety of contexts beyond the tragic/comic dichotomy, in Greek and Latin literature alike and separately from Homer; in some of these contexts Menander's excellence is underscored with exclusive reference to the comic drama. Thus, the late first century BC historian and teacher of rhetoric Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the late first century AD grammarian and rhetoric theoretician – and near contemporary to Statius – Quintilian, next to holding that the survey of Greek poets begins with Homer and ends with Menander, both ranked Menander immediately after Euripides.⁴ Quintilian, further, in the part of his *Institutio Oratoria* where he offers an overview of ancient authors-models of style, includes a detailed and exclusive treatment of Menander, only a little shorter than the discussion he devoted to Homer and far more extensive than the treatment dedicated to all the other poets, and this because the careful study of Menander alone would properly train the perfect orator. Referring specifically to the *Epitrepontes*, the first among the plays of Menander he highlights, Quintilian considers the play a model for the kind of judicial

³ See the full discussion in Citroni (2006) 10–12.

⁴ Quint. inst. 10,1,46–51 (Homer), 69–72 (Menander); Dion.Hal. imit. 6,2,1, p. 204 U.-R. (Homer), 6,2,11, p. 207 U.-R. (Menander); cf. Steinmetz (1964) 457–458; also Citroni (2006) 9–10.

oratory needed in everyday practice at the bar in Rome.⁵ Overall, Quintilian's views seem set to corroborate a common trend of admiration of Menander's comic pen systematically observed in the poetry of the Augustans. Horace, for instance, speaking of his friend and aspiring comic poet Fundanius in his *Satires* pronounced him the new Roman Menander-in-waiting.⁶ Still, all these assessments lack specificity: Menander is unequivocally admired but we are not told on what grounds he is ranked on top.

More interesting and perhaps more illuminating towards this peculiarly generic admiration for Menander's uncontested sublimity is offered by another set of literary references that ostensibly seem more explicit, because they record names of characters from Menander's text. Propertius refers to Menander as someone who has bequeathed later literature with standard comic characters, notably the courtesan Thais and the cunning slave Getas, respectively in Prop. 2,6,3–4 and 4,5,43–44. The two passages and their immediate contexts are as follows:⁷

*Non ita complebant Ephyræae Laidos aedis,
ad cuius iacuit Graecia tota fores;
turba Menandreae fuerat nec Thaidos olim
tanta, in qua populus lusit Erichthonius.* (Prop. 2,6,1–4)

'There was never so much crowding round Lais' house in Corinth, at whose doors all of Greece knelt down, *never such a swarm for Menander's Thais with whom the Athenians once amused themselves.*'

*nec te Medæae delectent probra sequacis
...
sed potius mundi Thais pretiosa Menandri,
cum ferit astutos comica moecha Getas.* (Prop. 4,5,41; 43–44)

5 Quint. inst. 10,1,69–71; Quintilian, also, accepted the tradition that Menander was the author of the speeches published under the name of the Attic orator and Menander's contemporary Charisius (who in turn was considered to have imitated Lysias; cf. Cic. Brut. 286).

6 Hor. sat. 1,10,42–43; apart from this single reference, this poet Fundanius is otherwise unknown.

7 The translations that follow the various textual quotations are my own unless otherwise specified.

‘But don’t let yourself be charmed by the shameful deeds of that clinging Medea..., *but rather by that expensive Thais of witty Menander, when the adulteress in his comedy cheats the shrewd Getae.*’

Menander is mentioned also in Ovid’s erotic poetry; there the comedian is addressed as premier poet of love, the favorite, to the point of sacredness, reading material for young boys and girls (ars. 3,331–332): *Nota sit et Sappho (quid enim lascivius illa?), / cuive pater vafri luditur arte Getae*, ‘And let Sappho be known (well what’s more lustful?), / or that one [sc. Menander], whose father is deceived by the cunningness of Geta’; (am. 1,15,17–18): *dum fallax servus, durus pater, improba lena / vivent et meretrix blanda, Menandros erit*, ‘as long as the deceitful slave, the harsh father, the shameless procuress and the cajoling courtesan are alive, Menander will be, as well’; (trist. 2,1,369–370): *Fabula iucundi nulla est sine amore Menandri, / et solet hic pueris virginibusque legi*, ‘no play of the sweet Menander is there without the love-element, and this is what boys and girls are accustomed to read’.⁸ Menander was safely read as late as the fifth century AD, definitely in Egypt, but also elsewhere in the Roman world. Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Auvergne in 472, directed his young son on a comparison between the *Epitrepontes* of Menander and Terence’s *Hecyra* (epist. 4,12,1–2):

quantum naufragioso pelago conformis est motus animorum, quippe cum nuntiorum turbinibus adversis quasi propria tempestate confundimur! nuper ego filiusque communis Terentianae Hecyrae sales ruminabamus; studenti assidebam naturae memineris et professionis oblitus quoque absolutius rhythmos comicos incitata docilitate sequeretur, ipse etiam fabulam similis argumenti id est Epitrepontem Menandri in manibus habebam. legebamus pariter laudabamus

8 Commenting on the attestation of the phrase *pueris virginibusque* in Horace’s *carm.* 4,1,25–26, Richard Thomas points out that the expression in question is recurrent in Horace’s corpus and is taken from the formulaic language observed in sacral and festive contexts (e.g. *Hor. carm.* 1,2,1–2; 3,1,3–4; *epist.* 2,1,132–133). Ovid appeals to the familiarity of his readership with the sacred texts in order to justify his amatory verse playfully; this is the case at *trist.* 2,369–370, a phrase where the sacral becomes the vehicle for the articulation of the sexual; cf. the comments in Thomas (2011) 97 *ad* 4,1,25–26. The same concept recurs in *Mart.* 3,69,8 (*a pueris debent virginibusque legi*) about the poetry of a certain Cosconius, which is fit for schoolboys and girls, unlike the poetry of Martial, which is associated with the *mentula* (3,69,2) and therefore is fit for ‘naughty youths and girls of easy virtue’: *nequam iuvenes facilesque puellae* (3,69,5).

*iocabamurque et, quae vota communia sunt, illum lectio, me ille capiebat, cum repente puer familiaris adstitit...*⁹

‘How the stirring of our minds resembles a ship-wrecking sea, thrown as it is to confusion by adverse squalls of news as if by a self-endangered storm! A few days ago, I and the son whom we both regard as ours were browsing on the wit of Terence’s *Heqyra*. I was seated beside him as he studied, following my natural inclination and forgetful of the formalities of my sacred calling; and in order to spur his receptive mind and enable him to appreciate the comic rhythms more perfectly, I had in my own hands a play with a similar plot, the *Epitrepontes* of Menander. We were reading, and at once jesting and applauding, and, such are the desire we all share, he was charmed with the reading and I with him, when suddenly a slave of the household showed up...’

Closer consideration of these literary *testimonia* on Menander’s artistry shows that none of them really advances a true critical analysis of his work from a specialist’s perspective, or is set to offer evidence that would corroborate the received acclamation. More important, no source discusses Menander’s dramaturgy or even comments on Menander’s comedies as pieces of drama. The brevity and vagueness notwithstanding, all the aforementioned literary *testimonia* clearly emphasize the aesthetics of the Menandrian *text*. This may allow the extraction of some intriguing conclusions, at work already in the Age of Augustus, on the status of Menandrian criticism: a) Menander’s reputation is stereotyped and serves as literary *topos*; b) Menander’s texts are not assessed as performance pieces, but as literary *texts*, reading material, or as perfect samples of attic speech to be studied and imitated by the aspiring orator; c) the assessment of Menander by the Latin sources above is most likely to have been extracted not from Menander’s texts themselves but from Roman Comedy.

Neither Propertius nor Ovid refer explicitly to some specific passage or even play of Menander. Propertius’ 4,5,43–44 should be understood in the context of a primarily *literary* dialogue about Menander: the phrase *Menandri...Thais* invites the reader to associate Thais with Menander’s literary reputation. The second Propertian text rather attributes to Menander typical characteristics of the Roman comic plot: the description of Thais and

9 Sidonius’ text and translation (with adaptations) are taken from Anderson (1965).

Geta in 2,6 evokes characters of the plautine *palliata* (the *mala meretrix* and the *servus callidus*), not of Menander's New Comedy. Ovid's statements refer to Menander as to a love poet, or rather, as love poetry – literary material to inspire those who would like to train themselves in the art of love. Sidonius' text, finally, is even more interesting: the reference to the *Epitrepontes* is the only case in his entire corpus of writings where he shows acquaintance with Greek literature or language, and as such it generates a good deal of justified skepticism.¹⁰

Quintilian's contemporary, Plutarch, stands as the only surviving author who may have engaged in a more technical discussion on specific aspects of Menander's *dramaturgy*. He composed a comparative study between Menander and Aristophanes to prove the superiority of the former.¹¹ Unfortunately, this treatise, entitled *Comparison of Menander to Aristophanes*, is now lost except from a brief summary that is included in the *Moralia* (mor. 10,853B–854D). The evidence provided by the language and style of the summary seems to exclude the possibility that the *Comparison* assessed Menander's merit as comic dramaturge, even though at the time the treatise was composed Menander's plays were still performed, albeit before select audiences of limited attendance, such as in *symposia*.¹² In the summary,

10 Semple (1968) 139, an earlier expert on Sidonius, has written: "What knowledge [Sidonius] has of Greek poetry and philosophy consists of tabloid maxims such as might have come from the grammarian's lectures." Already a century earlier Ausonius' writings suggest that the knowledge of Greek in the Gallic schools was in rapid decline (in his *Ludus Septem Sapientium* Ausonius uses a number of Greek words but has to translate these because his average reader cannot understand them; and in book 8 of his *Professores*, a collection of short epitaphs commemorating the grammarians of Bordeaux, he seemingly praises two of his Greek teachers while he notes that they taught him nothing at all). Notably, Ausonius strongly promoted a curriculum that taught the correct pronunciation and accentuation of Greek words from the start (indirect evidence that the instruction of Greek in his day was deficient) and, following Quintilian, recommended the *Iliad* and the plays of Menander as reading texts par excellence (see Migne, PL XIX, col. 881 [Ausonius, *Idyllium* 4, ll. 46–48]); cf. Polomé (1983) 511; on Sidonius' appreciation of Menander as a pedagogical exercise see also Bassett (2008) 216; on the near-disappearance of literary Greek from the Gallic schools by the time of Ausonius see Sivan (2003) 74–91.

11 Test. 103–107 K.-A.

12 Menander dramatic readings were extremely popular at the *symposia* during Plutarch's times; an interesting sketch of Menander at such a *symposium*, alongside a wide variety of other entertainments, is recorded in Jones (1991) 192–193. Also Plut. symp. 7,8 = mor. 712A–B (tr. Minar [1961]): "[New Comedy] has become so complete a part of the

Plutarch follows the same, text-based pattern of philological approach observed in Sidonius Apollinaris: he moves along characterizations that are broad and axiomatic, intending to impress rather than produce a distinct literary portrayal for the dramatist Menander; these are further accentuated by a persistent juxtaposition, according to which Aristophanes is by far the worse, his witticism being ‘bitter and rough’ and in possession of ‘a sharpness which wounds and bites’ (854C: Ἀριστοφάνους ἄλως πικροὶ καὶ τραχεῖς ὄντες ἐλκωτικὴν δριμύτητα καὶ δηκτικὴν ἔχουσι),¹³ the beloved of the uneducated people who revel in licentious and slanderous speech (853B: Τὸ φορτικόν... ἐν λόγοις καὶ θυμελικὸν καὶ βάνανσον ὥς ἐστὶν Ἀριστοφάνει... καὶ γὰρ ὁ μὲν ἀπαιδευτός καὶ ιδιώτης, οἷς ἐκεῖνος [sc. Aristophanes] λέγει, ἀλίσκεται, ‘Coarseness... in words, vulgarity and ribaldry are present in Aristophanes...; obviously, for the uneducated, ordinary person is captivated by what he says’). Aristophanes’ poetry, further, is like ‘a harlot who has passed her prime and then takes up the role of a wife, whose presumption the many cannot endure and whose licentiousness and malice the dignified abominate’ (854A: ὥσπερ ἐταίρας τῆς ποιήσεως παρηκμακυίας, εἶτα μιμουμένης γαμετήν, οὐθ’ οἱ πολλοὶ τὴν αὐθάδειαν ὑπομένουσιν οἱ τε σεμνοὶ βδελύττονται τὸ ἀκόλαστον καὶ κακὴν θες).

On the other hand, Menander’s comic diction is full of charm (854B: μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστα), abstains completely from vulgar speech (853B), and his poetry stands above ‘all the beautiful works Greece has produced’, as ‘the most generally accepted subject in theatres, in discussions, and at banquets, for readings, for instruction, and for dramatic competitions’ (854B–C: ὁ δὲ Μένανδρος..., ἐν θεάτροις ἐν διατριβαῖς ἐν συμποσίοις, ἀνάγνωσμα καὶ μάθημα καὶ ἀγώνισμα κοινότατον ὣν ἡ Ἑλλὰς ἐνήνοχε καλῶν παρέχων τὴν ποίησιν). And contrary to the bitter and rough wit of Aristophanes, Menander knows, in a unique and exclusive way among his comic peers, how to entertain without insult; only his comedies ‘contain an abundance of salty wit and merriment, which seem like the salt derived from that sea out of which Aphrodite was born’ (854A: μόναι αἱ Μενάνδρου κωμωδίαὶ ἀφθόνων ἁλῶν καὶ ἱλαρῶν μετέχουσιν, ὥσπερ ἐξ ἐκείνης γεγονότων τῆς θαλάττης, ἐξ ἧς Ἀφροδίτη

symposium that we could chart our course more easily without wine than without Menander”; on the staging of plays outside the theater, see also Handley (2002) 169–173.

13 The Plutarch text and translation of mor. 10,853–854D are taken from Fowler (1936) 459–473.

γέγονεν). The summary, in short, develops throughout along the lines of a sharp juxtaposition justified through evidence that is extracted exclusively from the language of the two rivals; specific technical observations refer only to matters of vocabulary, style, sound, structure, and the similar – among the educated Menander is much more appealing because he uses them ‘properly’ (μετὰ τοῦ προσήκοντος λόγου), which is distinguished by restrained employment of antitheses, homoioteleuta, and word-plays (853C):

λέγω δὲ τὰ ἀντίθητα καὶ ὁμοιοπτῶτα καὶ παρωνυμίας. τούτοις γὰρ ὁ μὲν
μετὰ τοῦ προσήκοντος λόγου καὶ ὀλιγάκις χρῆται ἐπιμελείας αὐτὰ ἀξιῶν,
ὁ δὲ καὶ πολλάκις καὶ οὐκ εὐκαίρως καὶ ψυχρῶς,

‘I refer to antitheses and similar endings and plays on words; indeed, these Menander uses with proper consideration and limited frequency, believing that they should be treated with care, but Aristophanes employs them frequently, inopportunately, and frigidly.’

No aspect of comic craftsmanship associated with the staged experience of comic performance is brought up. Still, Plutarch’s technical comments on Menander’s and Aristophanes’ contrasting styles are not substantiated through textual evidence from the works of the two dramatists; rather, these stylistic comments and the carefully constructed juxtaposition about the aesthetics of the text in the two authors are conveyed through formulaic, poetically charged vocabulary of much wider potential application. For instance, very similar vocabulary is used by Horace to describe the language of his great predecessor in the genre of the Roman Satire, Lucilius. In his *Satires*, Horace defines his own role in the evolution of the Satire genre by repeatedly taking on Lucilius’ style and language which in consistent fashion he dismisses as too unrestricted and vulgar, far below the literary aesthetics of his day: Lucilius is blamed because he wrote too much, too eagerly (at sat. 1,4,11–12, his speech is defined as *lutulentus* – cf. also sat. 1,10,50 – and *garrulous*, ‘muddy’ and ‘leering’), without taking the time to revise his original poems (at sat. 1,4,12, Lucilius is addressed as *piger scribendi ferre laborem*, ‘lazy to undertake the laborious task of [literary] writing’); as a result he failed to compose literature in language pure and clear according to the canon of appropriate Roman speech, ideally captured in the rhetorical and legal texts, and defined in Cicero, *De orat.* 1,144, as follows: *in qua precipitur primum pure et Latine loquamur, deinde ut plane et dilucide, tum ut ornate, post ad rerum dignitatem apte et quasi decore*, ‘in which (i.e. the rules detailed previously) it is designated,

first and foremost, that we speak pure and correct Latin, secondly, plainly and clearly, thirdly with elegance, lastly in a manner befitting the dignity of our topics and with a certain grace’.

Lucilius’ satiric speech is not pure, but damaged by his tendency (noted at sat. 1,10,20sq.) to mix Greek and Latin; it is also ‘rough’ (1,4,8: *duros componere versus*) and contains ‘wit too salty’ (1,10,3) – both attributions observed earlier in Plutarch’s comparison in the characterization of Aristophanes’ comic speech, one of the sources of influence for Lucilius’ language, according to 1,4,4–6. The ‘salty wit’ of Lucilius, however, Horace has to admit, is not necessarily bad (1,10,3–4): *at idem, quod sale multo / urbem defricuit, charta laudatur eadem*, ‘on the same page the same man [Lucilius] is praised for rubbing the City with all the salt of his wit’. And further down in the same poem Horace acknowledges that for the standards of his time Lucilius’ speech is *comis et urbanus* (1,10,65), ‘gentle and urbane’. Less than a century later, the same bitterness and acerbity of wit that Horace blames, Quintilian finds praiseworthy, in sharp disagreement with Horace’s view: in inst. 10,1,93–94, Quintilian distances himself from the excessive admiration others have shown for Lucilius (which implicitly informs us that Horace’s dismissal of Lucilius’ style was not representative of the *communis opinio*), yet at the same time he refuses to embrace Horace’s sharp criticism (10,1,94):

Ego quantum ab illis, tantum ab Horatio dissentio, qui Lucilium “fluere lutulentum” et esse aliquid quod tollere possis putat. Nam et eruditio in eo [Lucilio] mira et libertas et acerbitas et abunde salis.

‘I disagree with them [those who admire Lucilius excessively] as much as I do with Horace, who holds that Lucilius’ verse has a “muddy flow”, and that “there is always something in him that might well be dispensed with”. For his learning is as remarkable as his freedom of speech, and it is this latter quality that gives so sharp an edge and such abundance of wit to his satire.’

The discordance between Horace and Quintilian on the aesthetic value of Lucilius’ poetic speech may be instructive for the subjectivity of all literary criticism (which is often tied to the literary sensitivities, even strong interests of the critic who – as in the case of Horace, for instance – is often a literary figure himself in antagonistic relationship with the poet he criticizes), but the similarity in the vocabulary and the perspective of criticism employed by both Horace and Quintilian suggests that the poetry of Lucilius is not

assessed as Satire in terms of its satiric effectiveness more than it is as a *poetically determined literary* Satire – satiric speech expressed in literary language that is aesthetically defined according to Horace’s and Quintilian’s criteria. Plutarch’s literary opinion on Aristophanes vs. Menander echoes both Horace and Quintilian because it employs the same set-language of poetically determined literary criticism.

The parameters set for appreciating a piece of dramaturgy as a purely literary text dissociated from the stage, may further explain why Menander and not some other representative of New Comedy became the poster child of the genre in later centuries; for, during his time Menander was not the most popular comedian.¹⁴ Far more popular were Philemon and Diphilos. Philemon, Menander’s greatest rival, we are told, during their lifetime won more first-place awards than Menander at the *Lenaea* and the City *Dionysia*. Philemon’s greater success, in fact, the story goes, caused Menander some annoyance.¹⁵ The literary memory of this antagonism (and indirectly, of Philemon’s leading status as comic poet) survived into the Late Antiquity, when comedies were no longer played and seldom read, in a rather dull piece of work, the *Comparatio Menandri et Philistionis* (apparently mistaken for *Philemonis*).¹⁶ The validity of the views expressed therein, however, is impossible to ascertain because none of Philemon’s comedies survived, at least in Greek; and Diphilos’ plays met a similar fate.

What doomed Philemon and Diphilos and caused Menander’s fame to skyrocket in the centuries following their deaths and remain high for centuries thereafter, even as theatrical performances declined, was the simple fact that Menander’s language was easier to comprehend and therefore more appealing to non-Athenian, *hellenophone* audiences. Pseudo-Demetrius (*On Style* 193, of uncertain date, possibly first century AD, but inclusive of earlier material¹⁷) describes Menander’s style as disjointed and therefore better for immediacy and direct rapport in oral exchange:

Ἐναγώνιος μὲν οὖν ἴσως μᾶλλον ἢ διαλελυμένη λέξις, ἢ δ’ αὐτὴ καὶ
ὑποκριτικὴ καλεῖται. Κινεῖ γὰρ ὑπόκρισιν ἢ λύσις. Γραφικὴ δὲ λέξις ἢ
εὐανάγνωστος. Αὕτη δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ συνηρτημένη καὶ οἶον ἡσφαλισμένη τοῖς

14 On Menander’s success during his lifetime, see Konstantakos (2008) 88–93.

15 Test. 71 K.-A.

16 Text recorded in Jaekel (1964) 87–120. See also Dain (1963) 300.

17 On the date of Pseudo-Demetrius, see now the discussion in Marini (2007) 4–16.

συνδέσμοις. Διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ Μένανδρον ὑποκρίνονται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις, Φιλήμονα δὲ ἀναγιγνώσκουσιν.

‘No doubt the disjointed style lends itself better to debate. It likewise bears the name of “the actor’s style” since a broken structure stimulates acting. On the other hand, the best “writing style” is that which is pleasant to read; and this is the style which is compacted and (as it were) safely secured by connectives. This is the reason why, while Menander (whose style is for the most part broken) is acted, Philemon is a pleasure to read.’¹⁸

Demetrius notably calls Menander’s style (λέξις), ‘the actor’s style’ (ὑποκριτική), for the διαλελυμένη λέξις produced by the lack of conjunctions enhances the dramatic character of the delivery; on the other hand, Philemon’s λέξις which is ‘safely secured by connectives’ is called the ‘writing style’ (γραφική). On account of their different style, Demetrius continues, ‘Menander’s style... is acted’ (ἐναγώνιος), while Philemon is read (εὐανάγνωστος). In the expansion of the Hellenistic culture across the Mediterranean, the Attic koine soon became the *lingua franca*. Menander’s disjointed ‘actor’s style’ uniquely suited for dramatic delivery, determined his instant success and persistent popularity across time and space. Contemporary Athenian audiences preferred Philemon to Menander, as Demetrius seems to think so, but Hellenistic audiences who spoke and understood Attic Greek but were not native speakers of the language, found Menander’s style, being more close to the oral speech of their daily experience, far easier to understand and enjoy.

The transformation of Menander’s language into a dramatic *lingua propria* across the Hellenistic world goes hand in hand with the professionalization and internationalization of Attic drama already in the fourth century, when the first travelling actors’ guilds, the so-called, clubs of the ‘Artists of Dionysus’ (Διονύσου Τεχνῖται), were organized.¹⁹ The universal appeal

18 The best translation for the *On Style* is the revised 1995 translation at the LOEB series by Doreen Innes (=Innes [1995]), which is based on the earlier one in the series, by W. Rhys Roberts (1902 [repr. 1927]), now available online at: <http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/demetrius/index.htm>.

19 Worth mentioning is Isocrates’ *On the peace* 14 (a speech composed around 355 BC), wherein the orator criticizes the comic poets who publicize the failings of Athens to other Greeks, thus indirectly acknowledging that Attic comedies were routinely performed beyond the boundaries of Attica; see the relevant discussion in

Menander's plays gained through these groups of travelling actors was further enhanced by the apolitical, for the non-Athenian audience, character of Menander's plays. For, even though Menander's comedy is hardly dissociated from contemporary Athenian civic life, including politics, as several thoughtful studies in the last decade have properly argued,²⁰ this was not the case for the non-Athenian audiences of New Comedy. How many among the Hellenistic audiences of Asia Minor, the Greek Islands, Alexandria and Southern Italy, were familiar with later fourth and early third century Athenian family law and society? Not many, indeed. To these non-Athenian audiences, Menander's plays are less about Athenian politics and more about situations of domestic everyday life that could happen anywhere in the Greek world. This apolitical status buttressed the attractiveness of a readily accessible language, and so, made Menander a Hellenistic author, a generator of performances cross-cultural and cross-temporal.²¹

Still, this very plain to comprehend language and a set of plots that brought on stage situations from everyday life, that made Menander the most popular author of the Hellenistic era (a standard author in the education curriculum by the second century BC), also caused his doom for posterity, when the decline of full-scale theatrical performance firmly set in, as early as the second century AD,²² and the survival of the plays was

Konstantakos (2011) 153–162. On the pan-Hellenization of Athenian comedy in the fourth century see Körte (1905) 431–433; Pickard-Cambridge (1968) 279–280; Blume (1978) 29–30, 109–110; Handley (1985) 398–399; Taplin (1993) 1–6, 89–99; Green (1994) 67–69, 106–108; Slater (1995) 31–34; Csapo/Slater (1994) 3–4, 16–17, 223–224; Konstantakos (2000) 185–186; (2008) 88–93.

20 Important recent studies on Menander as commentary of the late-fourth-century Athenian city state ideology and social tensions include Lape (2004), (2010a) and (2010b); Konstan (1995) and (2010); Scafuro (1997); on the political dimension of Menander's seemingly apolitical plays, see Owens (2011); McGlew (2002) esp. 125–132; Major (1997); the pioneering study on the political relevance of Menander is Wiles (1974).

21 Konstantakos (2011) esp. 162sq. offers a very good discussion of the decline of political satire in the fourth century BC and the lack of political interest among the international audiences of New Comedy. Most earlier studies superficially attribute the phenomenon to external censorship and pressures by the political authorities; cf. e.g. Nesselrath (1990) 30–45 and Sidwell (2000) 247–258.

22 The decline continued with increasing speed until the early third century AD, which is the latest date some evidence indicative of comic drama staging is attested; see Jones (1993), for a discussion of Greek theatrical performances in the Roman world. The third-century terminus for Menander performances rests on the evidence of a lead

dissociated from their identity as primarily performance pieces. Menander's text continued to be copied throughout the Late Antiquity (in fact Menander is by far the most popular Hellenistic author among those copied by schoolboys in the Roman period), but only because his plays were considered to be easy reading texts for beginners, and, notably, a mine for brief, easy to memorize moralizing statements.²³ Exercises in writing and reading according to Menander's style were very popular, and for this reason passages from Menander, alike brief maxims and larger pieces (whole speeches or entire scenes) were collected and memorized at higher levels, in the rhetorical schools,²⁴ but they were not accompanied by literary study of the text, and so they did not teach students to appreciate Menander's refined, almost individual character-drawing, his subtle humor and dramatic irony. Accordingly, no need was felt for the compilation of detailed interpretive commentaries.

Finally, another unfavorable development affected the transmission of Menander past the fourth century:²⁵ during the second century AD grammarians of a strict Atticist order exercised their influence on literary style.²⁶ These critics castigated Menander for the occasional koine phrase and an alleged lack of pure Attic dialect, being blind to his lively poetic expression which reflected the language of his contemporary audience.²⁷ Their purist criticism combined with the lack of sustained scholarly attention had long-term consequences: Menander fell into oblivion during the so-

theater token, bearing the title of Menander's *Theophoroumene*, that was found in Athens and dating from the early third century.

23 On the popularity of Menander as a school text in the Roman period due to the accessibility of the language, see Blanchard (1997).

24 On the educational popularity of Menander's language, especially the maxims, see Barns (1951) 12–13; Tzifopoulos (1995); on the study of Menander's text, including whole plays, in Roman schools, at varying stages in the school curriculum, see Cribiore (2001) 194–201; Wissmann (2010) 69–71; and earlier, Marrou (1956) 156 (primary education), 163 (secondary education), 188 (higher education); also Bassett (2008) 215–218.

25 The date for the latest, to this date, surviving manuscript of Menander is the fourth century; it is part of an as yet unpublished Syrian palimpsest stored in the Vatican Libraries (Vat. Sir. 623), which preserves nearly 400 lines of Menander, half of which come from the *Dyskolos*, and the other half from an unknown comedy, also by Menander; the palimpsest dates from the ninth century AD and was found in the Vatican in 2003; cf. D'Aiuto (2003).

26 On Atticist disapproval of Menander, see Blume (2010) 15–16.

27 Test. 119–120 K.-A.

called dark centuries (about AD 650–850); no manuscripts survived through this time to be copied in the medieval period.²⁸

Modern Appreciations of Menander and New Comedy

A similarly complex picture of Menander is to be found again, in the modern appreciations of his poetry.²⁹ His reputation as a great poet, inherited from the ancient sources, remained uncontested, even though impossible to prove, across the centuries; as a result, the wider communication of the first extant fragments of actual Menandrian plays in the late 19th century when Gabriel Cobet and Viktor Jernstedt published the *Membrana Petropolitana* (the former, the *recto* in 1876, the latter, the *verso* in 1891) and in the early 20th century (specifically in 1907 when Gustave Lefebvre published the Cairo codex) generated great expectations. Since the publication of the *Membrana* a substantial part of Menander came to light. William Geoffrey Arnott has opined that so far we have in our hands 8% approximately of Menander's total production.³⁰ Paradoxically, the more Menander was coming to light, the controversy over Menander's talent and the quality of his plays increased; the more papyri were being published, the less critics became or remained fascinated.³¹ The initial enthusiasm over the discovery of Menander subsided almost immediately,³² and the anticipation for the emergence of great literature once the extant fragments were read was never rewarded, but rather disappointment grew stronger in the 1970s,

28 In general on the circumstances that enforced survival of Menander in antiquity and brought about the disappearance of his text in the byzantine ages, see Easterling (1995).

29 Blume (2010) 14–30, constitutes the most recent study that tracks the course of the emergence of Menander as a known dramatist during the past century.

30 Arnott (1979) xxx.

31 On the ongoing controversy over Menander's reputation among critics in the course of the 20th century prior to the publication of the Bodmer papyrus, see Lever (1960) 321–326; for an account of ancient vs. modern views of Menandrian comedy, see Handley (1965) 12–17; the assessment of Menander's artistry had been ongoing in the quarter-century following the publication of the Bodmer papyrus and while the first major reference commentaries on Menander were being compiled; on how much the basis of modern criticism changed during that time, see Arnott (1975) and (1979) xxvi–xxx, xlvii–lii; Handley (1979); Luppe (1980).

32 “On the whole, the fragments have been disappointing: they hardly by themselves explain Menander's great reputation in antiquity”; the quote comes from the entry on ‘Menander’ in the *The New International Encyclopedia*, vol. 15 (New York 1920) 388.

as the first comprehensive editions of the plays were being produced: Menander's 'realism', so highly praised in antiquity,³³ and the simplicity of his plots belied expectations – especially following the increasing prominence of literary theory in appreciating the sophistication of ancient literature. Dissatisfaction with the picture of Menander as this was taken increasingly more concrete shape caused several eminent critics to express bitter disappointment as late in time as 1990. The following extract from Peter Green's *Alexander to Actium* distinctly captures that trend albeit in a rather extreme and exuberant fashion:³⁴

"The moralizing asides thrown in *to give these puffball plays extra weight* should not blind us to the fact that they were *the precise ancient equivalents of modern situation comedies or soap operas*. A contemporary reader may find some difficulty in appreciating the reasons for the high status Menander, for instance, enjoyed throughout antiquity (though not, interestingly, during his lifetime). [...] Obviously, Hellenistic society was not chiefly remarkable for kidnappings, coincidental rape, and contrived happy resolutions. What, then, did Aristophanes of Byzantium mean when he praised Menander for so skilfully imitating life? The compliment cannot but strike us as paradoxical, since to our way of thinking Menander's plays are remarkably formulaic and artificial."³⁵

Green's criticism reproduces a view popular in the 70s and 80s, that as a rule fourth-century theatre was ridden with decadent mannerism, rhetorical sentimentalism, and inane recycling of conventions – a misleading view seriously challenged for the first time in Pat Easterling's landmark "The end of an era?"³⁶ This conviction about the lowly status of postclassical comedy went hand-in-hand with the idea that, in an era of crisis for the democratic polis culture, Menander chose popularity over risk by promoting an

33 Aristophanes of Byzantium, Quintilian and even the astronomical writer Manilius noted with approval Menander's 'realism' (Test. 83, 94, 101 K.-A.); also Aristot. poet. 1451b12–13, 1455a33–34.

34 The discussion on this page and the next page is an abbreviated form of a more detailed argument published in Petrides/Papaioannou (2010b) 4–5.

35 Green (1990) 67; the emphases are mine; elsewhere in the same book (77), Green called Menander's plays "second-rate hackwork"; cf. Green's overall discussion on Menander on 71–79.

36 Easterling (1993).

“apolitical” genre of comedy. New Comedy was routinely taken as a comedy of the *vita privata*, which consciously eschewed the great public issues, inasmuch as the individual was increasingly estranged from politics.³⁷ Furthermore, Green and several other critics of his generation demonstrate a tendency to appreciate Menander’s Comedy not in its own right, but against superficially akin but ultimately dissimilar analogues, such as the Comedy of Manners.³⁸ Compare, for example, Arnott’s definition of *character* in Menander with that of *humour* in the Comedy of Manners by William Congreve (1670–1729). For Arnott, character in Menander is “the sum of a person’s idiosyncrasies in speech and behavior, an externally viewed set of matching characteristics”.³⁹ For William Congreve, correspondingly, humor, that is, the constitution of bodily fluids which conditions human personality, was “a singular and unavoidable manner of doing or saying anything, peculiar and natural to one man only, by which his speech and action are distinguished from those of other men”.⁴⁰ The comparison with the Comedy of Manners, however, well-intended might it have been (its principal motivation was to offer the less informed readers of Menander a place to start their appreciation of Menander), is nonetheless prejudicial, presumptive of the view that New Comedy does relate to the Comedy of Manners – which is obviously not the case.

In the nineties, cultural studies and gender studies proved that Menander’s plays were very closely tied to Athenian social and political reality of the late fourth century; the apolitical character is a clever façade cultivated by Menander himself, crafted to deemphasize Athenian politics of the day and exclusive references to events and characters known only to an Athenian audience, and thus produce plays that could both appeal to the ‘knowing’ Athenians and, at the same time, be attractive to the different hellenophone audiences beyond Athens. This internationalization of Attic comedy ultimately made New Comedy Athens a convention of a dramatic setting. Dramatists far and wide played intelligently with these conventions

37 Green (1990) 52 calls it “political disenchantment”.

38 Cf. Green (1990) 66: “What emerges – something wholly predictable in the light of political and social developments – is new to Greek literature: the private comedy of manners.” See also Post (1934). The “defense” of Menander by Post is interesting, inasmuch as it arguably constitutes implicit acceptance of the fact that Menander did not write comedy as “sophisticated” as his Comedy of Manners counterparts.

39 Arnott (1979) xxxii.

40 Congreve 1696 at McMillin (1997) 475.

and with traditional Greek character-types who gradually lost their distinct Athenian identity. In this respect, the uniqueness of Menander's plain speech may lead to a whole new light of inquiry about the aesthetic criteria of defining and appreciating New Comedy. It might not be unreasonable to hypothesize that Menander was deliberately crafting this particular style of plain, asyndeton-marked speech in order to distance himself from traditional Attic-labeled dramatic effects. This would explain the various contradictions in the profile outlined above, and aptly captured in Plutarch's text, according to which Menander is considered, on the one hand, the best poet of post-Aristophanic comedy, and at the same time, the opposite to Aristophanes – an opposition that Menander, truly Hellenistic in spirit, might have deliberately sought as a means to advertise his intention to cut his own, distinct new path of comic expression away from the shadow of Aristophanes and his popular contemporaries and predecessors.

New Comedy and Roman Comedy

The research on Roman Comedy is entwined with the strides in the study of Menander and New Comedy. The students of Roman Comedy prior to the publication of the first Menander papyri knew that Plautus and Terence 'transferred' in Latin Greek plays of New Comedy, but they could only hypothesize about the nature of this 'transference'. The discovery of Menander promptly showed that Plautus improvised considerably on his Greek models, while Terence read very much like a Romanized version of Menander. Numerous ancient testimonies⁴¹ ascertain that Plautus consistently held the title of the most popular comic dramatist at Rome, and to this contributed, among other factors, his distancing from Menander. The divergence of Plautus' plays from Menander's in theme, structure, language, and meter (including rhythm and music) had great impact on the advancement of Roman Comedy studies in the past century: it led critics to focus on the differences between Plautus and Menander, which eventually systematized the study of Plautus, led Plautine scholarship in the course of the 20th century onto an evolutionary journey that began with the definition and prescription of Plautus' 'originality' (a term itself understood only in light and assumption of Menander as the standard text of reference), and

41 Collected in Parker (1996).

produced sophisticated and theory-infused analyses of the Plautine texture aiming at comprehending the authenticity of Plautus' authorial genius in its own right.

At the same time, little attention has been paid so far to Plautus' predilection for Diphilos and Philemon, Menander's more farce- and pranks-oriented antagonists. If language made Menander the best-selling playwright in the Hellenistic East, the same was not the case in the Italian West. The Attic koine that forged the popularity of Menander in the Hellenistic East was not as an important factor in the popularity of Attic comedy in Rome. Roman audiences were able to comprehend basic Greek but it is highly unlikely that they could follow a dramatic performance in Greek, in any dialect, including Menander's koine. Hence, Menander logically was less of an influence on Plautus than were Diphilos and/or Philemon,⁴² for the Roman playwright was better inclined towards models that favored less refined speech, cruder jokes, farcical violence, and more impressive dramatic effects, and were closer to the prankish and para-dramatic character of Middle Comedy. Diphilos and Philemon comply much better with this profile, and it is not fortuitous that they have been classified as writers of the *Mése* by later critics in antiquity.⁴³ Diphilos is specifically mentioned as the model for Plautus' *Rudens* and *Casina*. The *anagnorismos*-plays of *Vidularia* and *Captivi* likewise include motifs familiar from Diphilos' fragments.⁴⁴ The attraction exerted on Plautus by Philemon is evident in the

42 Nesselrath (1990) 332–333.

43 For detailed discussion of the plays of Diphilos and Philemon and their adherence to the generic ideology of Middle Comedy, see Webster (1970) 125–151 (on Philemon) and 152–183 (on Diphilos). Recently, in a discussion of Apuleius' *Florida* 16, May (2006) 58sq., argued that the inconsistencies in classification of some of the Empire's earlier comic writers is to be understood in the context of a broader debate on the accuracy of the traditional tripartite division of Comedy into Old, Middle, and New, and on the possible need for reconfiguration of the criteria for categorization. The following statement of her text encapsulates her position (61): "It seems that, far from lapsing into an error as is usually agreed [sc. in calling Philemon a Middle Comedy author], he [Apuleius] may here be following a contemporary debate about the style of comedy, which classified authors not so much by the period at which they wrote, but by their particular style, a specific interest of the Second Sophistic."

44 MacCary (1973); Lefèvre (1984); Damen (1985); Anderson (1993) 46–59 argue that *Rudens* and *Casina* are both credited to Diphilos in the text of the plays. Moreover, since both comedies contain scenes of disputation, Anderson assumes that this type of scene was a trademark of Diphilos.

way that Plautus incorporates, and makes extensive use of, the comic character of the trusted friend/helper whose introduction is attributed to Philemon. Philemon's *Thensaurus* [sic] is mentioned by name as Plautus' model for *Trinummus*. Philemon's *Emporos* is widely held to be the model behind Plautus' *Mercator*.⁴⁵ The strong similarities that exist between the comedy of Plautus and the Middle Comedy plays, further, are symptomatic of influence of the latter on the former, without this implying any necessity to prove direct accessibility to Plautus of actual Middle Comedy texts; rather this interaction was indirect, intermediaries being New Comedy authors like Philemon who were font of standard comic themes of the *Mése*, such as the predilection for mythological comedies.⁴⁶ The clearest example of Plautine stage reproduction of a probable Middle Comedy script is *Amphitruo*.

Plautus' success shows that regardless of class, Romans adored the farce and did not care much for elaborate arguments on stage. Terence had never had won over the Roman audiences precisely because of his choice to adopt a style that, to later critics, bore marked closeness to the Menandrian *urbanitas*. Terence himself encouraged this belief: Four of his six plays explicitly name Menander as their model, and the other two, Apollodorus of

45 Anderson (1993) 34–46 refers to a list in Apuleius' *Florida* citing 12 comic characters in the work of Philemon that purportedly show the stock character of the "helpful friend" to be unique to the Greek playwright. Philemon's model, it is argued, inspired the trusted friend figures in Plautus' *Bacchides*, *Pseudolus*, *Mercator*, *Trinummus*, and *Mostellaria*. For more on Philemon and Plautus see Lefèvre (1995); and Hunter (1980).

46 To this day it remains unresolved whether Plautus could have had access to actual scripts of Middle Comedy plays, or seen a performance of a Middle Comedy. What is fairly certain is that as early as the third c. BC Middle Comedy authors had fallen out of favor with the public. Copies continued to be made of their plays, but this was for scholarly and archival reasons alone. Middle Comedy technique survived only indirectly, in the imitations of New Comedy authors. Plautus could have been familiar with original Middle Comedy plays only if he had access via friends to libraries in Greece and Alexandria and through them acquired copies of these plays. By the late third century very few copies of the Middle Comedy plays were still in public circulation. There is a near-complete absence of papyrus fragments, in contrast to the situation with Menander and various other New Comedy authors (for more on the rapid decline in the popularity of Middle [and Old] Comedy in Hellenistic times see, e.g., Nesselrath [1990] 331sq.). We do not, moreover, possess a single example of a so-called theatrical papyrus from the *Mése*, the existence of which might provide evidence of interest in theatrical performance of these works. It seems fairly certain that in Plautus' day the plays of Middle (and Old) Comedy were not being performed on stage by the travelling theater groups (on the repertoire of these Hellenistic *thiasoi*, see Gentili [1979]).

Carystus, “Menander’s closest disciple in New Comedy’s second generation”.⁴⁷ Of course, Terence did not translate *verbatim* in Latin Menander’s speech, but he made the point to develop a style that would readily and distinctly call for comparison with that of Menander; hence, rather than following Plautus in employing the exuberant language that strove to revive on stage the everyday speech of the Roman *populus*, Terence opted for a more restrained comic speech,⁴⁸ but also for a speech that would remind the erudite elite among his audience of Hellenistic literature – and along with it of literary sophistication. The symbolic role of Homer as the archetype of literary excellence and source of literary inspiration, and the uncontested place of the Homeric texts at the foundation of the anxiety of influence that distinguished all Hellenistic poets, caused literary aesthetics and the symbolism of Homer to interfuse for the Hellenistic authors, and likewise for the Roman poets who aspired to bring Alexandrianism to Rome. Along similar lines, the widespread popularity of Menandrian comedy by the beginning of the second century BC, caused Menander to become the ideal literary model for the young, ambitious, and newly emerging playwright Terence, who aspired foremost to win over the favor (and the financial support) of the Roman aristocrats by offering them intertextually self-conscious plays that would readily (and positively) be compared to Menander’s plays and overall artistry.⁴⁹ The approval of the elites would

47 Thus Lowe (2008) 119.

48 Barsby (1999) 20 seems to summarize the contemporary *communis opinio* on the subject: “The essential difference [sc. between Plautus and Terence] is that Plautus deliberately exaggerates the colloquial elements [i.e. terms and expressions, and frequency of abuse; terms of endearment; an assortment of interjections on various occasions aiming at infusing the action with high emotion; and most importantly, colloquial word-formation, specifically diminutives, frequentatives, slang of all kinds, figures of speech and exuberant rhetoric] of the language of his characters in order to make a greater impact on his audience, whereas Terence aims at a colloquialism of a more refined or studied kind, such as will not detract from his portrayal of character and theme”; this statement is part of a lengthier discussion (19–27) that includes a detailed comparative examination of Plautus and Terence in terms of language and style. Earlier studies on the language of the two great Roman comic dramatists include Duckworth (1952) 331–360; Palmer (1954) 74–94; Papaioannou (2013) 11–13.

49 This argument of Terence’s eagerness to invest on self-conscious intertextuality and make it his signature structural technique has been developed most recently in Fontaine (2014) and Papaioannou (2014). Both believe that Terence’s exclusive adherence to Menander is directly attached to the ready identification of a Menandrian intertext by an

strengthen Terence's position and endorse his effort to introduce his innovative dramaturgy to the great majority of the less educated among his audience and invite them to enjoy a more structured and intelligent alternative to the dramatic exuberance of Plautus.

In any case, Terence's close adherence to Menander is mentioned specifically as early as the first century BC. The earliest ancient testimonies include the famous comment by Julius Caesar who, according to Suetonius, praised Terence for his *purus sermo* but blamed the author for falling short in *vis comica*, 'comic strength', in comparison to his Menandrian model (Suet./Donat. *Vita Ter.* 7), and Cicero's view that Terence was the only dramatist to bring Menander to the Romans (Cic. fr. 2 *FPL*³ / Caes. fr. 1 *FPL*³). When the Late Antiquity came, and along with it the end of theatrical performances – a process accelerated by the wide popularity across the Roman empire of the mime and other kindred spectacles of farcical or immodest character –, Terence's literary artistry and *purus sermo*, his texts (not his dramaturgy), retained their popularity throughout the Middle Ages. Terence became the earliest Roman writer to have his entire corpus survived, and the only ancient dramatist to have his entire body of work preserved; his plays remained a staple of the school curricula and later inspired the Medieval Comedies, thus guaranteeing the continuation of ancient comedy in very difficult times.

Terence's studied adherence to the style of Menander, contrary to the popular trend of his time, points back to Menander as it naturally raises the same question for the motives behind the choices that forged the Greek dramatist's personal, unique style. Is it possible, in other words, that Menander deliberately chose to write in the particular refined and simple form of Attic Greek, in order to set himself apart from the earlier tradition, but mostly from his more popular contemporaries who opted for the linguistic patterns of yore? This is a question that invites a whole new approach to the study of Menander's artistry, because it defines Menander's popularity in conjunction with the comic dramaturgy prior to him, and the popular trends during the time he was launching his career – trends that

experienced audience, and, by extension, to his desire to sound Alexandrian and erudite. Fontaine, further, emphasizes the fact that Menander from Hellenistic times onwards was considered the second most important Greek author after Homer; hence, a preference for Menander was connected to poetic succession, including the continuation and revival of poetic tradition across cultures and languages.

certainly influenced his literary decisions. Foremost, this need to reconsider Menander vis-à-vis his antagonists calls for a more comprehensive study of the Athenian New Comedy as a genre of many diverse and idiosyncratic authors, many of them very popular. The undertaking becomes especially pressing given the numerous fragments from the plays of the less known New Comedy authors, which have seen the light of the day in the decades since the publication of *Poetae Comici Graeci* series.

Firm steps towards this direction have been taken recently. Adele Scafuro's chapter in the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy* argues that the internationalization of comic performances, the need, that is, to produce plays for a diverse and international audience likely had been felt already in Athens at the time of Menander.⁵⁰ Menander's decision for the koine, as a result, contrary to earlier tradition, seems deliberate and clairvoyant of the progressively growing more culturally diverse audiences of Athenian drama. Then, Luca Bruzzese's 2011 study on Philemon portrays the dramatist as a representative of what Bruzzese considers the transitional phase of Attic Comedy, which took place shortly before Menander. This characterization is of course conditioned because the fragmentary status of all works that possibly belong in the period does not allow for proper literary appreciation of the 'transitional' character of these plays. Still, new insights will be developed from a fresh examination of the fragmentary comic dramatists in light of interpretive perspectives influenced by the new trends in the study of Menander (including the fragmentary Menander). Regarding, for instance, Demetrius' schematic thesis discussed earlier, that Philemon was seen as best for reading and Menander for staging, because Menander's language was ἐναγώνιος, whereas Philemon's own was more close to that of a prose text (γραφική), hence εὐανάγνωστος, Bruzzese convincingly points out that Demetrius' position is a misguided application of Aristotle's remarks in *Rhet.* 1413b3sq.⁵¹ This conclusion calls for a reassessment of the criteria that determine the comic style most successful for a comic performance. As more fragments of New Comedy plays are destined to come under the scope of critics, the reconsideration of the

50 Scafuro (2014).

51 See Bruzzese (2011) 223–231, on Demetrius' 'acting' and 'reading' styles; on Demetrius' definition of dramatic styles see also Nesselrath (2014) 673–674, his most recent discussion of fourth century comedy.

Sophia Papaioannou

literary interaction between Menander and his literary peers will appeal more strongly and widely.

Menander's role in the evolution of the Comedy genre, in conclusion, is still hardly defined; the more we study his texts in the context of genre definition and genre evolution, the more new issues emerge that revise ideas and concepts previously formed, and point out that the only certain rule about fragmentary authors and genre concerns the relativity and precariousness of overreaching theories.

Abbreviation:

K.-A. = Rudolf Kassel/Colin Austin (eds.), *Poetae Comici Graeci. Vol VI 2: Menander: Testimonia et Fragmenta apud Scriptores Servata* (Berlin/New York 1998).

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Sophia Papaioannou

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