MENANDER'S CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

STAVROULA KIRITSI, *Menander's Characters in Context: From the 4th Century BC to the Modern Greek Stage*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne 2019. Pp. 339. ISBN: 9781527540170.

THE BOOK on the emotions in Greek tragedy, first published by William B. Stanford in 1983, was quite innovative, since this topic had previously been neglected by the classical scholars,[1] but it also showed some naivité. In the following decades, especially in the 21st century, the interest in emotions from a literary, cultural, and historical perspective has increased greatly, as attested by the large number of publications.[2] Among those, the work of David Konstan, which undoubtedly represents a milestone for everyone who wants to deal with emotions in ancient Greece,[3] offers a theoretic framework for Stavroula Kiritsi (later "the Author"), who also speaks of him as her mentor (pp. viii–ix). However, her investigation is original because she focuses on a dramatic genre (comedy) and an author (Menander), which still lie almost at the margins in this field of study, and she goes even further, walking the path of reception studies:[4] in fact, she considers not only two of Menander's comedies, *i.e. Epitrepontes* and *Dyskolos* (1st part of the book), but also some modern productions of these plays (2nd part of the book).

In an accurate "Introduction" (pp. 1–16), the Author provides the basis for a correct approach to Menander, the characters of his comedies, and the

1. W. B. Stanford, *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions: An Introductory Study*, London 1983. For a review of this book, see M. Lloyd, "Emotion in Greek Tragedy", *CR* 38 (1984) 198–199.
2. For a selected bibliography, see M. De Poli (ed.), *Il teatro delle emozioni: la paura*, Padova 2018, 12–14, and M. De Poli (ed.), *Il teatro delle emozioni: la gioia*, Padova 2019, 11–12.
3. D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks. Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*, Toronto/Buffalo/London 2006. This book, generally very appreciated, has recently been under debate as for the emotion of jealousy: see *e.g.* G. Sissa, *La gelosia. Una passione inconfessabile*, Roma/Bari 2015, 15–20; W. Allan, "The Virtuous Emotions of Eurpides' *Medea*", *G&R* 68 (2021) 27–44, esp. 31–34.
4. At p. 13 the Author reflects on the idea of "reception" and says that this term "appears in the title of this book", but she probably refers to a previous version of it.

fortune of his plays in the twentieth-century Greece, "in accord with the injunction of Fredric Jameson: 'Always historicize!'" (p. 1), and she discusses the essential bibliography on these matters.

The influence of David Konstan (but also William Fortenbaugh) is particularly evident in the first chapter of this book on "The conceptual world of Menander's comedies" (pp. 18–58), where both general and specific considerations about emotions are always derived from Aristotle's works, mainly *Ethics* and *Rhetoric*. The Author selects and focuses on those emotions "affecting characters in Menander's *Epitrepontes* and *Dyskolos*" (p. 42): *charis* ("gratitude"), *to philein/philia* ("love"), *homonoia* ("social concord"), *eunoia* ("goodwill"), and *to misein* ("hatred"). She explicitly calls a particular attention to gratitude because it is "an important sentiment in Menander's comedies" and "it is rarely if ever included in modern inventories of the emotions" (p. 46).[5] In her exposition, she also remarks some aspects that appear to be more relevant in connection with some theatrical conventions, such as the wearing of customs and masks, and with characters typical of the New Comedy, like father/mother and son/daugther, husband and wife, master and slave, friend and flatterer. Finally, the Author is well aware that "the use of Aristotle's ethical theories to illuminate Menander's comedies […] may seem odd today", but she also claims that in the classical Athens "the boundaries between philosophy and theatre was [a typo for "were"] far more porous than we might suppose today" (p. 58).[6]

The second chapter (pp. 59–100) deals with the main characters of the *Epitrepontes*, *i.e.* Smikrines, his daughter Pamphile, and her husband Charisios. Anger seems to be the dominant emotion of this old father, but it actually depends on his temperament, which is "a mixture of stinginess, a sense of honour, and a genuine concern for his daughter" (p. 75): it means that Smikrines is not angry by nature. Thus, he offers to the Author an opportunity for a digression on *aneleutheria* and *mikrologia* based once more on a reading of Plato, Aristotle, and Theophrastus. Pamphile trusts in his father's *eunoia* and affirms her *eunoia* towards his husband in order to restore "the *philia* that is proper to a married couple" (p. 79): she utters just a few words in the play, but they are very effective. The Author insists on stating that Menander does not offer caricatures like those described by Theophrastus (pp. 64, 70), and Charisios is a good example of "complicated character"

5. However, a chapter on gratitude is *e.g.* also in Konstan (n. 3) 156–168.
6. This idea is often reaffirmed by the Author throughout the first part of this book: see *e.g.* pp. 64, 99.

(p. 81): first he is affected by *eros* and *philia*, then he is overwhelmed by anger, and finally he feels gratitude for his wife. The analysis of this character is very accurate, much more than I can summarize, but one may wonder if Charisios' anger is the kind of anger felt by lovers, also called jealousy. This question does not find an answer in the Author's book, probably because she accepts Konstan's suggestion that "ancient Greeks in the classical period may not have known jealousy at all in the modern, romantic sense of the word and that what we call 'jealousy' may rather have been distributed among a variety of other sentiments. The very concept, that is, may have been lacking".[7]

The third chapter investigates Menander's *Dyskolos* (pp. 101–149) and focuses on the characters of Knemon, Gorgias, Sostratos, and Chaireas. In fact, a large part of it is occupied by a dissertation on *dyskolia*, always with references to Plato, Aristotle, and Theophrastus, an analysis of the old man who lives in the country, far from other people, and considerations about the connections between *dyskolia* and either anger or *philia*. The latter is essential to the relationship between Gorgias and Sostratos, who also feels love and fear, and a particular kind of it, *i.e. praktikos philia*, can be detected in the character of Gorgias, although he could appear to the audience just like a *kolax* in accord with the considerations on this figure offered by the same three classical philosophers. The Author properly mentions that "in the list of *dramatis personae* in B" (p. 147) Chaireas is identified as a *parasitos* instead of a *philos*, and she assumes that the "reception of Chaireas as *parasitos* rather than *kolax* in the late third-early fourth century AD, when B was copied, was closer to the perception of a *kolax* in the Middle Comedy" (p. 148): such a statement would probably require the support of more bibliography,[8] because either the distinction or the identification of *kolax* and *parasitos* is still a debate among scholars.

At the beginning of the second part, the fourth chapter aims to outline the process of "re-appropriation of Menander" in modern Greece, after the

7. Konstan (n. 3) 220.

8. *E.g.* H.-G. Nesselrath, *Lukians Parasitendialog. Untersuchungen und Kommentar*, Berlin/New York 1985, 88–121; H.-G. Nesselrath, *Die attische Mittlere Komödie. Ihre Stellung in der antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin/New York 1990, 309–317; M. J. Pernerstorfer, *Menanders Kolax. Ein Beitrag zu Rekonstruktion und Interpretation der Komödie*, Berlin/New York 2009, 151–166. I also suggest my reconsideration of the question in M. De Poli, "Between *archaia* and *nea*. Considerations regarding the titles of three of Menander's comedies: *Trophōnios*, *Kolax*, and *Hypobolimaios*", in M. De Poli, G. E. Rallo, B. Zimmermann (eds.), *'Sub palliolo sordido'. Studi sulla commedia frammentaria greca e latina – Studies on Greek and Roman Fragmentary Comedies*, Göttingen 2022, 118–129.

shipwreck and the loss of his comedies until the papyrological findings in the twentieth century. The Author finds three steps: in 1816, Constantinos Oikonomos translated Molière's *L'Avare* into vernacular Greek; in 1845, Andreas Moustoxydes published for the first time a comedy entitled *Neaira*, written in classical Greek by Dimitrios Moschos in Renaissance Italy (1475?); in 1871, Demetrios Paparigopoulos wrote a play called *Agora*, dedicated to Menander. The reception of the ancient playwright in nineteenth-century Greece is strictly interwoven with the "Language Question" and the evolution of the comic tradition, and anticipates many questions common to the productions of Menander's comedies in the following century. Moreover, the search for a Menandrean manuscript in the third act of Paparigopoulos' *Agora* is a device later exploited by Tony Harrison in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. Finally, after the discovery in 1905 of a papyrus that included fragments of the *Epitrepontes*, the arbitration scene of this comedy was staged in the Parnassos Philological Society in 1908: in the long talk on New Comedy, Menander, and this particular fragment, that preceded the performance, Georgios Soteriades "mantained that Menander's art was of much higher quality than the plays of his imitators [*i.e.* the Roman playwrights, such as Plautus and Terence]" and he "praised the way Menander delineated his characters" (p. 167). But the Author omits to consider that what Soteriades argued on the basis of the arbitration scene of the *Epitrepontes* had already been claimed many centuries earlier: in his *Attic nights* (2.23), in fact, Aulus Gellius contrasted the characters of Menander's *Plokion* with those of Caecilius' *Plocium* and concluded that those in the Greek model were much better sketched and more effective than those in the Latin comedy.

In the fifth chapter, the Author deals with two modern productions of the *Epitrepontes*: in 1959, the company "The Theatre of 59", directed by Kanellos Apostolou, chose the translation in verse with some completions by Nikos Sfyroeras; in 1980, the company "Amphi-Theatre", directed by Spyros Evangelatos, chose the translation by Tassos Roussos. In the sixth chapter, the Author deals with two modern productions of the *Dyskolos*: in 1960, the "National Theatre", directed by Alexis Solomos, staged it for the first time in Greece and chose the translation into demotic Greek verse by Thrasyvoulos Stavrou; in 1985, the "Theatrical Organization of Cyprus", directed by Evis Gavrielides, chose the translation by Leonidas Malenis. This analysis required an accurate examination of many materials of different kinds, such as personal interviews, essays and notes in the programmes of the productions, recordings of productions, newspaper

reviews, and scripts, and the Author certainly did a great job collecting and discussing all of them. Perhaps, the reader would expect a discussion of each play organized per character, which does not strictly follow the order of the events in the play, that is, the same approach adopted in the survey of Menander's texts, but some particular aspects of these productions probably pressed the Author to follow the division into acts almost always.

After several articles, this is the first book by Stavroula Kiritsi and no doubt it is considerable for the complexity of the subject she handles with competence. Some typographical faults[9] or inconsistencies[10] do not invalidate the quality of her work, which is generally accurate and original in many respects. New Comedy and Menander have been shadowed by Aristophanes and his comedies for a long time, but this work contributes to restore the quality of a playwright, who have been neglected because of the loss of his texts until a century ago, when papyri brough them to a new birth. Any further publication by Kiritsi on the reception of New Comedy in Renaissance Italy and the emotional responses of modern audiences to productions of Ancient Greek tragedy and comedy, which are announced in the back cover, promise to be interesting and will certainly be welcome.

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9. I offer a list of the typos I have detected, and hope it might be somehow useful: beside that at p. 58, "thtat" for "that" (p. 29), "opposd" for "opposed" (p. 55), "Sosratos" for "Sostratos" (p. 111), a blank line unnecessary within a paragraph (p. 295), alphabetical disorder in the bibliography from "Traill" to "Turner" (pp. 324–325). At p. 61, a slash marking the border between ll. 143 and 144 would be helpful to understand the extension of the supplement in the fragmentary text.
10. Throughout this book, the Greek "hypsilon" is mostly transliterated into "u" apart from *Dyskolos*, *dyskolos* and *dyskolia*, and the reader might be confused by this inconsistency in particular at p. 106, where the Author says that "Aristotle associates the *dyskolos* with the *duseris*" as if the two Greek compounds have a different prefix.