Blocking Fathers, Illicit Marriages: Continuity and Change from Sophocles to Menander

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the plays of Menander owe a great debt to Classical Athenian drama: connections between plays such as Aristophanes' *Cocalus* and Menander were noted in *didascalia*, and similarly the thematic and structural similarities between New Comedy and the works of Euripides were already recognized in Hellenistic scholarship (Arnott 1972; Csapo 2000; Hunter 2011). Sophocles, on the other hand, is rarely included in this discussion of dramatic influence, more often regarded solely for his role as the pinnacle of tragic poets. It is the purpose of this paper to reanalyze possible connections between the corpus of Sophocles and that of Menander by examining both the *Antigone* and the *Dyscolus* as plays employing one of the most familiar stock characters of ancient comedy: the "blocking" father figure.

This father figure—whose earliest incarnation arguably belongs to Old Comedy, such as Strepsiades from *Clouds*—is perhaps best known for his characterization in the plays of Greek New Comedy and their later, Latin iterations. Generally an old and intransigent father, the "blocking" figure is generically defined by his interference in the life of his young offspring; in New Comedy, this interference takes the form of intervention in the budding romance of two young lovers, whose inconvenient marriage will inevitably bring about the typical finale. This character, at first glance, may appear to be a creature created solely for light-hearted drama. Creon of the *Antigone*, however, whose stubborn and belligerent character has been carefully surveyed for his role within the tragedy itself (see Roisman 1996), additionally shares many features with the father of Menander's only intact play, Knemon of the *Dyscolus*. In both plays, it is the work of just such a father who aims at severing the affair between his child and an unfit suitor that presents the driving force of the drama. Furthermore, both fathers effectively prevent

choral celebration: Creon's very entrance in the *Antigone* countermands the chorus' attempt at rejoicing for the end of the war, while in the *Dyskolos*, it is not until Knemon begins to dance that the play can reach its conclusion (see Lowe 1987 and Murnaghan 2013). Menander himself seems to beg for these connections to be drawn when he characterizes the downfall of Knemon as a *hamartia*—a mistake that Knemon himself, in an act of *anagnoresis*, recognizes after his "near-death" experience (Anderson 1970). In bridging the gap between these distant works, I will also call attention to the extant fragments of Euripides' own *Antigone*, whose scanty remains indicate not only a vastly different, but also far "happier" conclusion for the romance of Haemon and Antigone—one which particularly resonates when compared with New Comic archetypes and may be seen as a further intermediary step in the development of the Greek stage from the Classical Period onward (Huys 1997).

Kathryn Gutzwiller, exploring the metatheatrical elements of Menander's plays, noted that "tragedy is in fact a mask worn by Menander's comedy" (2000: 10). With this statement, she was implying that the use of tragic elements—whether direct quotation, plot device, or metatheatrical comment—allows the New Comic poet freedom to masquerade briefly as something other, simultaneously defamiliarizing the standard events of the New Comic stage and casting them within a well-known, yet nevertheless external, dramatic milieu. Both continuity and change are at stake in the use of a "tragic mask" on a New Comic stage. In this paper, by revealing the character types of Knemon and Creon and by drawing out parallels between the *Antigone* and the *Dyscolus*, I aim to expand the number of such "masks" available to Menander while demonstrating too that there are further avenues of Sophoclean reception to be explored.

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